

UNICEF  
Teacher TRAINING Packages

# **Student Guide**

## **NQF Level 4**

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)

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# ACRONYMS

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELDA	Early Learning and Development Area
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
NCF	National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children Birth to Four
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PBA	Play-based Approach to teaching and learning
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

# GLOSSARY

**agency** refers to the feeling of knowing you can make decisions, do things by yourself, control your environment, voice your ideas, and feel valued and appreciated by the people who are important to you

**assessment** is a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children

**child-initiated play** is planned, chosen and started by the child

**child-directed play** activities are controlled, decided on, organised by the child while they are being played

**co-opted play** is when adults join in child-initiated and directed play towards scaffolding further learning

**executive function** is a set of thinking processes which work together to help us remember information we need to complete a task, pay attention during an activity, filter out distractions, control ourselves. They help us to think creatively and solve problems, and be flexible to adjusting our plans

**free play** (or unstructured play) is when children engage in open-ended play that has no specific learning objective.

**guided play** (instructional play) is when adult design play activities for children

**intentional teaching** means that teachers work with specific outcomes or goals in mind for all areas of children's development and learning

**iterative** means doing something over and over again in different ways

**mirroring** means that this guide employs similar play-based features for adult learning activities to those used to support play-based learning and teaching with children

**open-ended questions** are questions that do not have one correct answer. There are many possible answers and this encourages higher level thinking and problem-solving

**play-based (approach/ teaching and learning)** is creating learning opportunities for children through play to help them develop skills, understanding and solve problems based on their interests and strengths.

**play environment** is the setting in which children can safely explore different activities and learn about new things and have a fun time doing it.

**playful instruction** refers to games and other activities used by the teacher with particular learning objectives in mind.

**reflect** means to think deeply about an experience to develop a greater understanding so that our work continues to improve

**scaffolding** describes the role of a more knowledgeable other in guiding and supporting a child to learn new concepts and develop their skills.

**structured play** is play that has been designed with a particular learning objective in mind.

**teacher-directed play activities** are controlled, decided on, and organised by the teacher while they are being played

**unstructured play or free play** is when children engage in open-ended play that has no specific learning objective.

# A. HOW ADULTS LEARN

## Purpose

This section introduces the features of play that support adult learning

## Learning outcomes

- ◆ Understand that different features of play are important in supporting adult learning as well as child learning
- ◆ Become familiar with the features of play
- ◆ Reflect on the role of play for your own learning experiences

Human beings have an innate and powerful capacity for learning which occurs across the lifespan.

At each stage in our growth and development we are learning even though this learning occurs in different ways and makes different demands of us. Learning also always occurs within a context, and this context either facilitates learning, or presents obstacles to it. This is as true for adults as it is for children.

We also learn in different ways and through different means. Research is showing us that one of the most powerful facilitators of learning is play, and that playful activities need to be present in children's learning environments if learning is to be as successful as it can be for the child's overall development.

There are some important features that make up the kind of play which supports children's learning. These features are aspects or properties of the kinds of play that help children to grow and develop. By looking carefully at the play that children engage in, or do, we as teachers can decide whether or not the kind of opportunities for play that we offer to our learners are likely to support their learning or not.

So what are these features? Research agrees that the most important features are:

- ◆ **Intentional.** Play has a purpose, and has a goal
- ◆ **Differentiated.** Play gives different children with different ways of thinking and learning an opportunity to participate
- ◆ **Active.** Play requires that children take part, that they engage, that they do not simply sit and watch
- ◆ **Fun.** Play has joy in it, it makes children happy, they enjoy themselves doing it
- ◆ **Choice.** Play is done by choice, not by force, the children themselves decide to do it.
- ◆ **Agency.** Play allows children to make decisions, do things for themselves, voice ideas, and feel valued.

### Activity: How we learned?

Think about something that you remember learning later in your life, as a young adult, or as a grown person. It needs to be something that was important to you. Perhaps you learned a musical instrument. Perhaps you learned to use Word on the computer. Perhaps you learned to grow a vegetable garden. Perhaps you learned another language.

Think about that learning experience, and then put down some quick answers in the table below.

Question	My answer
Did my learning have a purpose or a goal? What was it?	
Did it give me with my own particular way of learning, a chance to participate? Did I participate in a way that helped me to create meaning out of the experience? How did this happen?	
Did I have to be active, or did I simply sit back and let it happen almost without me? Give an example of a way in which you were active in your own learning.	
Was it fun? Maybe parts of your learning process were fun. Are those the parts that you most remember? Or that you enjoyed the most? Give an example of what was fun.	
Did you, as an adult choose to engage in this learning, whatever your reason might have been?	
Were you involved in your learning, did you have to think about what you were doing while you were learning? Give an example of what/how you had to think.	

Features of a positive and successful adult learning experience are often very similar to the features of the kind of play that supports learning in young children.

If we think about this more deeply, we could also say then that if adults were to engage in playful learning that has these features, they would also have successful learning experiences.

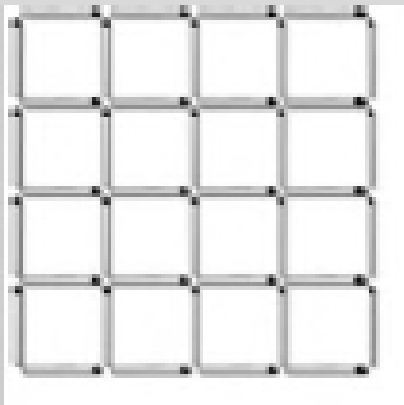
### **Activity: Features of play**

#### **Let's Play!**

Get into pairs or groups of three. Your group will get 40 matchsticks. Arrange them in a 4 by 4 square grid (see below).

Using the matchsticks that you have been given, change this shape by removing 9 matches so that no square of any size remains.

The first group to find the solution is the winner.



Answer these questions about the game you have just played.

1. Did this game have a purpose or a goal? What was it?
2. Did it give people with different ways of thinking an opportunity to participate?
3. Did it require that you engage in it?
4. Was it fun? Did you enjoy yourself while you were doing it?
5. Were you all involved in it, and thinking while you played it?



## **B. PRINCIPLES OF PLAY**

### **Purpose**

In this section basic features of play are introduced through a series of active learning experiences. There are also opportunities to reflect on implications for supporting play-based teaching and learning.

### **Learning outcomes**

- ◆ Develop an understanding of the principles which are important in relation to learning through play
- ◆ Reflect on what these mean for teachers wanting to support play-based learning
- ◆ Experience the different principles of play by engaging in, and reflecting on, active learning activities

### **Play-based Approach Principles**

Educators and researchers all over the world agree that play is an extremely important activity for young children because it supports their learning significantly. People have different understandings of what play is, and define it differently, often based on their cultural and social contexts and backgrounds. However, there is some agreement about which principles are important to think about when we talk about play as a means by which young children engage in learning, and teachers in teaching. These are not the only principles, but are most commonly agreed on, and most helpful to teachers.

These principles are a useful way for teachers to: reflect on the play they see their children engaging in and learning from; to create more playful early learning settings which support learning; and to help assess children by means of play.

Remember that play is the activity that best facilitates children's construction of their own knowledge.

These principles are:

- ◆ That play is intentional (it has a purpose)
- ◆ That play is inclusive, and can be changed or modified to give access to different children
- ◆ That play demands that children be active
- ◆ That play is fun
- ◆ That children often make choices about their play activities
- ◆ That children can lead, direct and control their own play activities, or can participate in play activities led, directed and controlled by teachers / caregivers.
- ◆ That play is meaningful in that it offers opportunities for children to come to terms with and create meaning about their world

- ◆ That play is social and communicative
- ◆ That play is a process rather than a product.

These principles apply to all the different kinds and stages of play, whether it is free play, co-opted play, guided play or instructional play. They also apply to a play-based approach to learning. This is because these principles are helpful for teachers to have in mind when they plan any kind of play activity, and is a useful way for teachers to check that the play activities they are planning for the children are in fact those that will support learning.

These principles are all equally important, and they all need to be present in play and in play-based teaching and learning.



### Principles of play

So let's start with the principle that most people associate with play, which is that learning through **play activities should be fun**.

Different people and children will find different things fun, it is not something that can be measured, or forced on someone, but with this principle the idea is that any child engaging in a particular play-based learning activity should do so happily. The activity should be such that the child experiences a deep level of joy. We know when a child is happy: it shows in the body language of children, in the things they say and in the excitement with which they

play. Perhaps the child repeats the activity again and again to experience it many times. Perhaps the child chooses to engage in the play activity over everything else available. Perhaps the child simply cannot wait to do the activity.

All these are signs that the activity is fun. And when something is fun, motivation is high, the child is fully open to learning, and learning happens without the child needing to make much effort.

If a game or playful learning activity is difficult for the child, it will be frustrating and anxiety provoking rather than fun to do. On the other hand, if the game is too easy and contains no challenge, and does not offer children an interesting opportunity to practise what they have learned, then the play might be boring and not fun.

### Activity: Play is fun

The class will play the game 'I Spy' which is a well-known children's game.

#### Part One

Play this game as instructed by the facilitator.

Rate it on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

#### Part Two

In one minute,, jot down as many names of objects that you can see easily around you.

Then rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

#### Part Three

Find one name of an object that you can see around you, for each letter of the alphabet.

Rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

#### Part Four

Jot down the names of everything that you see around you that contains the chemical element hydrogen.

Rate this on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

Look at the ratings for fun that you gave the different versions of this game and see: (i) if your rating changes with each different game, and (ii) what changes did you notice, and why did they change them?

The next principle of play is that it has a purpose, and has a goal, that it is **intentional**. This means that play should have, from both the child's and the teachers' points of views, a purpose to it, even if that purpose is simply one of exploration or of practising a cognitive skill. It is important to remember that there are different kinds of play and different stages of play, and the intentionality of play may be different in each.

Think of a 6 year old child sitting in the sandpit pushing a small car up and down. While the child might learn something about wheels, it is not very clear what the purpose of this play activity is. But a child who plays with a car and is involved in making a bridge for it to go from one point to another, has a purpose to that play. The purpose might be, from the child's point of view, to explore which materials make a good bridge, how strong a bridge has to be, how long a bridge has to be to get to a certain point, and so on. The purpose of this play activity from the point of view of the teacher could be similar to that of the child, to learn about objects and materials. But play changes, change is part of the nature of play, so in this case even though the child's play might change in its nature or content, for example the child might take the play in a different direction, the bridge might be extended, or it might have to turn a corner, or it might have to hold many cars or heavier trucks, there is still a purpose to it.

### Activity: Play is intentional

Get into pairs.

1. Each player starts with 2 dice and 5 rocks (or other counters).
2. The objective of the game is to capture all of the other player's rocks.
3. Players take it in turn to roll the dice. Each player adds up the sum of his/her two dice, and whoever has the higher number gets to "steal" a rock from the other player.
4. Continue playing until one player has ALL 10 rocks.

Answer these questions:

- (i) Is there a purpose to this game?
- (ii) Can children learn anything by playing this game? If so, what?

This game is both interesting and challenging, and encourages children's arithmetical thinking skills. It is in its essence, intentional. The game encourages children to engage in shared thinking and problem solving in order to practise arithmetic ideas (addition, larger than, smaller than) and so it has learning value.

The next principle of play, which is directly related to the principle of **inclusivity**, is that it is **differentiated**. Play gives all children with different ways of thinking and learning, with different strengths and challenges, an opportunity to participate. In any one South African early learning setting at this moment there are children who learn differently to others, children who might have particular challenges and difficulties, or simply children who prefer one way of learning (visual or auditory learning, for example).

The principle of **differentiation** means that activities in play-based learning must be designed and planned in such a way that any and all children can participate and benefit. It is not simply that all children can watch the game, but that all children can actively participate, including those requiring extra support because of learning or physical disability, social disadvantage, cultural difference or other barriers to learning. The play activity needs to support these children as much as any other child.

### Activity: Play can be differentiated

Play this game called 'Sounds Interesting' in groups of 4 or 5 people.

The first person in the group chooses a single or double letter sound ('s', or 'ch' for example). S/he has to say whether they want the sound at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word. For example, "I choose the sound 'sh', and I want it at the end of the word (as in the word 'wish')."

Each person in the rest of the group has to think of a word containing this sound, and present it to the group. However, they have to present their word in any way OTHER THAN speaking it. For example, they might spell it, draw it, or mime it.

Everyone has to guess what the word is with that sound in it. The first person in the group to guess the word gets a point.

Then the next person takes a turn to present their word to the group.

When everyone's word has been presented for this round (for example 'sh' at the end of a word) the person with the most points is the winner of that round.

The next person in the group now chooses a different sound.

The game finishes when everyone in the group has had a turn to choose a sound, and the person with the most points wins the game.

Groups are to discuss:

- (i) Does this game allow children with different abilities to participate?
- (ii) What are those different abilities?

e.g. If a child can't spell, s/he can draw or mime their word. It is an inclusive game.

The next principle of play is play being **meaningful**. Play gives children an opportunity to process and think, to test out and practise what they know, and to try and engage with what they don't yet know about the world. Play-based activities and experiences can help children to strengthen what they already know, as well as to discover and test out new ways of thinking about the world. In this way it supports them as they try to extend their knowledge, understanding and skills.

**Activity: Play is meaningful**

Play the game 20 QUESTIONS in small groups.

**How to play:**

One person thinks of a word. S/he tells the others if the thing they are thinking of belongs to the category of: Person or Place or Thing.

The rest of the players have to ask questions to try to guess what it is.

There are two rules for this game:

1. All questions must be answered "yes" or "no" ONLY.
2. The other participants may only ask 20 questions IN TOTAL (not 20 for each person)

One person is the question counter, to make sure that the group does not ask more than 20 questions.

If the participants can guess correctly in 20 questions or less, then the next person has a turn.

If they cannot guess correctly in 20 questions or less, then the same person goes again.

The next principle is that **play is communicative**. It is in play that children find unlimited opportunities to share with each other. They share their understanding, they test out that understanding with others, and they may even change their understanding a little by having been in communication about it with others.

Even in solitary play, children may not be communicating with another person, but they are thinking about what they are doing while playing, and in this sense it could be said that they are communicating with themselves.

**Activity: Play is communicative**

A game that requires direct communication is 'Pictionary'.

Get into groups of 3.

Each person will be given two words by the facilitator. The words are not to be shown to the rest of the group:

One person chooses one of their words and has to either act out the word or draw it on a piece of paper. They have 2 minutes to do this, and then stop. The other group members have to try and work out what the word is. The person who guesses correctly draws or acts out one of their words.

An important principle in play, and one that is easy to overlook in a busy early learning setting is that of **choice**. Play should be voluntary, and should not be forced. The child should have some choice. This is not always possible, but play-based learning should always have at least some part of choice. For example, children can be given a choice between two or three activities. Another way to bring choice into an activity is to allow children to change the play activity on their own, amongst themselves or even working with a teacher, freely. Children should and will change the content of their play, the direction it takes, and the purpose of their play when they feel the need to.

**Activity: Play allows choice**

Think of a simple, easy game that you played when you were a child that you would choose to play now if you were given a choice.

- (i) Why would you choose to play this game?
- (ii) Which of the principles discussed so far apply to this particular game?

**Agency** is particularly important for children. While they play they are fully engaged, very involved in the play or playful activity, and are thinking all the while they do it, even though that thinking may take different forms as the play progresses. Agency in play and play-based activities also means that in engaging in play, children have the opportunity to lead, direct and control their own play activities.

Even as adults, if we feel that we have some control in a learning situation, it feeds into confidence and a positive engagement. Positive emotion is an important source of energy for children during their development. Being able to have some say in the play activity, to be able to follow a direction that their developing mind wishes to follow, all feeds into creating this.

Having agency means that children are also **active** in their play. Good play-based activities require that children take part, that they engage in the activity, that they do not just sit and passively watch. As adults, we also learn by watching, listening but mostly, by doing.

All the games that you have played thus far have demanded your active participation, and in doing so, the playful games have been intended to support intellectual, emotional and even social engagement.

This is exactly what we hope to achieve in creating more playful early learning settings, in introducing play-based activities into the learning environments for young children.

As Maria Montessori said, “play is the work of the child”, the work of developing and growing in understanding, knowledge and skills.



### **Activity: Principles of play**

#### **Time to be active!**

Divide into groups of 4. Each group will get a piece of string, a lump of playdough and four kebab sticks. The group's task is to invent a simple game **for children** where the following principles are clearly present:

- (i) It is fun
- (ii) It is intentional, it has a clear purpose which the group can identify
- (iii) It will be accessible to as many children as possible
- (iv) It requires that all children participate equally
- (v) It is meaningful in some way
- (vi) It promotes active engagement

You have 20 minutes to do this. The game has to be:

- a) written down,
- b) drawn out in a drawing or diagram,
- c) orally presented and demonstrated to the whole group.

Each person in the group must take on one of these tasks (writing, drawing, speaking or demonstrating).

The small groups will present their games to the class.

After each presentation, the class will discuss:

1. Were all the required principles of play present in the game?
2. If not, which principles were absent in the game?
3. How the game can be changed so that more of the principles are present in it?

## **C. WHAT IS A PLAY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING (PBA)?**

### **Purpose**

It is important for teachers and caregivers to understand how and what children learn through play, as this sets the stage for a play-based approach to teaching and learning. This section aims to deepen participants' understanding of play – what play is, its importance in children's learning, different types of play and some characteristics that can be seen when children are involved in play. A play-based approach to teaching and learning is then introduced.

### **Learning outcomes**

- ◆ Understand the importance of play for children's development.
- ◆ Learn about characteristics of play in children.
- ◆ Describe different types of play that support children's development and learning.
- ◆ Start to become familiar with the play-based approach to teaching and learning.

### **What is play?**

The first step in understanding a play-based approach is to discuss what play is and how it relates to learning.

It has long been recognised that play is important children's holistic growth and development. In any ECD setting you will see children of all ages engaged in and enjoying different types of play and the ECD practitioners working with the children will tell you "Play is children's work.". But what does 'learning through play' really mean?

- ◆ Do children learn all they need to learn through play?
- ◆ Are there activities that help children learn in other ways?

Play is difficult to define because people understand it in different ways. It is easier to recognise play by looking at how children behave when they play.

Children are free playing

- ◆ when they can choose for themselves what, when and how to play
- ◆ when it's something they want to do for its own sake and the enjoyment that it brings (and not for any rewards)
- ◆ when the activity or what they are doing is more important than how it turns out in the end.

### **Activity: What is play?**

During the practical activity, imagine that you are a child of the age on your label which will be given to each person by the facilitator.

Move around, explore and use the materials set out.

After the activity share your experiences in your small group, and discuss whether you think they were play activities:

- ◆ Could you choose your own materials and use them in your own way?
- ◆ Did you enjoy what you were doing?
- ◆ Were you involved in what you were doing – or did you just want to finish it?

## **Characteristics of play**



**Characteristics of play (adapted from Zosh et al 2017)**

### **Play is joyful**

Children learn best when they are having fun. They enjoy play for its own sake and will play whenever they have the opportunity. As children play, they try new things and feel good when they succeed. This is important because it motivates children to learn.

### **Play is meaningful**

Children make sense of themselves and their world through play. As they play, they make connections between familiar concepts and new information. In this way they are able to build on what they already know and understand.

## Play is actively engaging

Children learn best when they are active. Children learn by doing, by using their five senses to explore the objects, people and places in their environment. As they pursue their own interests and ideas during play, they become deeply involved in what they are doing.

## Play is iterative

Iteration means repeatedly doing something and learning more each time. As children play, they repeat actions several times to practise skills and explore new ways of doing things.

## Play is socially interactive

During play children develop social relationships with other children. They learn important social skills as they communicate their thoughts and ideas and play together with other children. Social interactions also help children develop their language skills and master concepts in a creative way.

### Activity: Characteristics of play

Watch the video presented where you will see two children playing with blocks during a free play activity. Observe the children as they play and reflect on whether the play experience is

- ◆ joyful
- ◆ meaningful
- ◆ actively engaging
- ◆ interactive
- ◆ socially interactive

Give examples from the video.

## Stages of play

### How play changes with social development

As children develop socially, they start to learn to play with each other. They move through stages of development that are increasingly more complicated. Children will often engage in different types of play at different ages and will move in and out of these stages.

- ◆ **Solitary play.** Children play alone as they explore objects around them, unaware of others around them.
- ◆ **Parallel play.** Children play alongside others. They play with similar things but do not interact with each other.
- ◆ **Associative play.** Children become interested in one another. They may play together and talk about what they are doing, but do not work together to complete a task.
- ◆ **Cooperative play.** Children share their materials and ideas. They often play together in games or to complete a project.

**Solitary play**



**Parallel play**



**Associative play**



**Cooperative play**



**Stages of play**

Understanding these stages of development helps teachers to know how to respond to and interact with children as they play.

**Activity: How children play with others**






In your group, look at your puzzle picture and discuss what you see.

◆ How are the children playing?

Prepare a role play to demonstrate how children will play in this stage of development. Use the play materials that were set out earlier.

# Five types of play

There are different types of play that support physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains of development. Children need the opportunity to use these five types of play.

 <p><b>Physical play</b></p>	 <p><b>Play with objects</b></p>	 <p><b>Symbolic play</b></p>	 <p><b>Pretend and socio-dramatic play</b></p>	 <p><b>Games with rules</b></p>
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Types of play

## 1. Physical play

Physical play is closely linked to children's physical development and includes:

- ◆ **Active exercise play** – play activities that support development of children's gross motor skills, such as rolling over, crawling, running, jumping, sliding, hopping, galloping, skipping, and climbing
- ◆ **Fine motor play** – play activities that support development of children' fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, such as grasping and shaking a toy, drawing, cutting, threading beads and completing a puzzle.
- ◆ **Rough-and-tumble play** - the very physical and active play that young children of all ages enjoy such as kicking, chasing, pulling and pushing, tickling, play fighting and wrestling.

## 2. Play with objects

Playing with objects is an important part of children's development. From an early age babies explore objects with their mouths, fingers and feet, and try to make things happen by shaking, dropping, rolling, knocking down or bouncing object. Children find out about the nature of objects through their own actions, learn important concepts such as size, texture and shape, and develop thinking and problem-solving skills important for science and mathematics.

### 3. Symbolic play

Symbolic play starts to appear at about two years of age and refers to the child's ability to use a toy, object, picture or drawing to represent a real-life thing.

For example:

*A child may hold a block to their ear and talk on the 'phone' or use a doll as their baby to feed and rock to sleep.*

### 4. Pretend and socio-dramatic play

During pretend play children take on other people's roles. Pretend play is often called socio-dramatic play because it involves social interactions. Children draw on their own experiences to explore the roles of people in their family and community and act out familiar events such as going to the shop or feeding the baby. In this way they start to make sense of the world around them.

Advances in technology allow children to replay stories and take on the roles of characters they have seen on television or in computer games.

### 5. Games with rules

Games with rules are those in which children understand and agree to follow the pre-set rules of what can and can't be done in a game. Examples of games with rules are board games like lotto, and grid games like hopscotch. Rules may also be set and negotiated by children who are playing a game they have made up themselves. Games with rules develop social skills like sharing, taking turns and helping others. Children also develop their language skills as they explain and negotiate rules.

#### Activity: Five types of play

1. Read the information (above) for the type of play you have been given.
2. Discuss the types of play activities you could provide to help children develop and learn for
  - ◆ Babies (0 – 18 months)
  - ◆ Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)
  - ◆ Young children (3 – 5 years)Write your ideas on flipchart paper.
3. Choose one of these age groups and prepare a game, song or activity that will support this type of play.
4. Prepare a presentation to:
  - ◆ Explain this type of play.
  - ◆ Share your list of activities.
  - ◆ Teach your game, song or activity to the rest of the class.

## Why play is important

Play is recognised as being so important that the **right to play** is set down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The South African government recognises this right and they have the responsibility to make sure that the rights of all children in South Africa to play become a reality. As ECD practitioners we need to also protect the child's right to play by providing enough time and opportunity for play.



**Children have the right to play and rest**

### Activity : The right to play

Make a poster for parents that you can use to explain the child's right to play.

Your poster should

- ◆ be colourful and attractive with pictures
- ◆ provide clear information that is easy to understand.

Each group will present their poster to the whole class.

## Children develop and learn through play

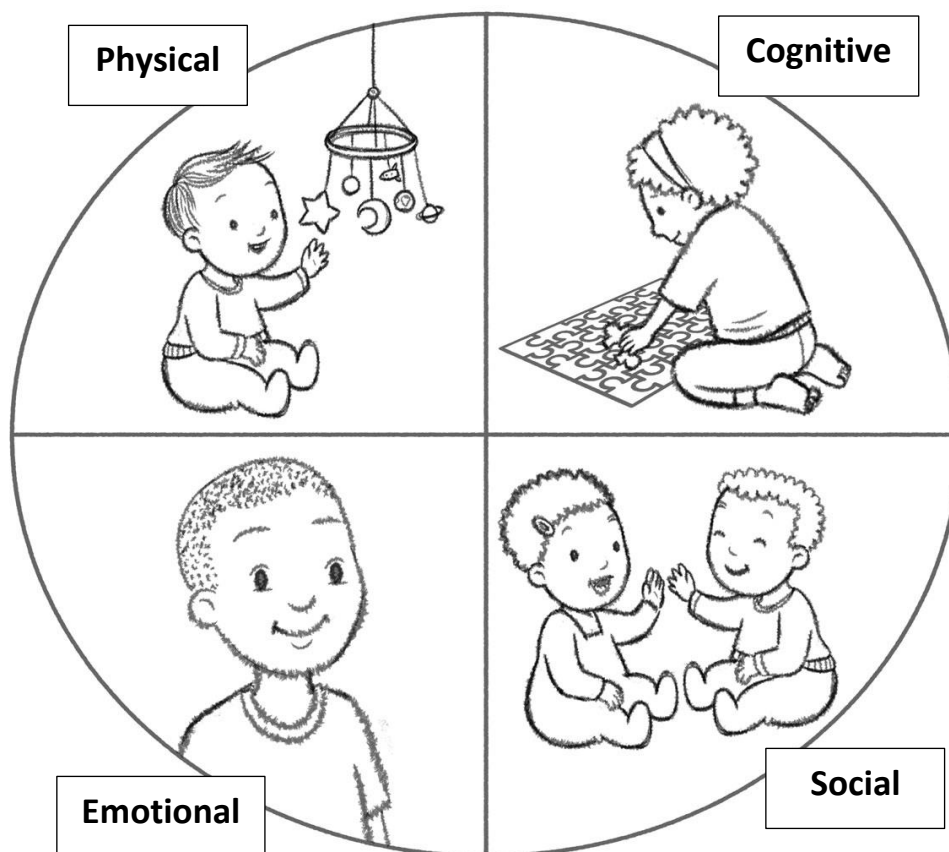
Hands-on active learning through play builds nerve connections in the brain. Giving children time to practise and repeat their experiences strengthens these connections

Play supports all aspects of children's holistic development:

- ◆ **Physical development.** Play keeps children healthy and develops their bodies. As children move around and play, they use their bodies and strengthen their gross motor development. Activities that use smaller muscles like grasping a rattle, tearing paper, drawing and using scissors provide for their fine motor development and eye-hand coordination.



- ◆ **Social and emotional development.** An important life skill is being able to fit in and get along with other people. In playing with other children they learn to share, take turns, cooperate and build friendships. Pretend play helps children find ways to cope with their emotions as they act out fears and worries in their everyday lives.
- ◆ **Cognitive development.** As children play, they investigate objects, materials and living things and learn about themselves, other people and the world in which they live. They also develop cognitive skills that are important for concept learning, such as the mathematics concepts used during pretend play, construction and water play activities. Play offers children the opportunity to experiment with different materials, express their own thoughts and ideas, work through and solve problems. From an early age child start to think in symbols which is important for mathematics, reading and problem-solving.
- ◆ **Language development.** Play supports children's language and literacy development. Much of their play involves other children, and they use language to communicate and share their ideas. Their language skills increase as children attach meaning to the words they use during play.



**Child's development supported by play**

### Activity : How children's play supports their development

Think about the game, activity or song that you prepared and shared earlier. In your small group, discuss how this play experience stimulates children's development

- ◆ physically
- ◆ socially and emotionally
- ◆ cognitively, including language

Write down your ideas on flipchart paper.

Select one person in your group to report back.

## Play and executive function

An area in the front part of the brain is responsible for a set of important skills known as **executive function skills**. These skills help us to organise our thinking and manage our behaviour. They start to develop early in a child's life and continue through the early childhood and school years.

There are three areas of executive function skills:

1. **Working memory.** This is the ability to hold information in our memory and be able to draw on it and use it when needed.

For example:

*A child can remember the rules of a game.*

2. **Inhibitory control.** This is what we know as self-control and it is the ability to not be distracted by what is happening around us so that we can complete a task or control our behaviour.

For example:

*A child is able to complete a puzzle without being distracted by sounds and activity around them.*

*A child is able to pay attention during story time without being disruptive.*

3. **Cognitive flexibility.** This is the ability to shift our attention and look at things in a new way where necessary. It teaches us to be creative and adapt or change our way of thinking in order to solve problems.

For example:

*A child can switch from sorting cards based on the colour of the object to sorting based on a different rule, such as the type of object on the card.*

In reality these three areas work together, with children developing important skills like

- ◆ planning
- ◆ setting goals
- ◆ paying attention
- ◆ focusing on a task and completing it
- ◆ asking questions
- ◆ using other people's ideas
- ◆ solving problems
- ◆ managing emotions
- ◆ understanding how their behaviour affects others.



### Executive function skills

**Table 2: Activities to facilitate development of executive function skills**

Here are some play activities that build children's executive function skills (adapted from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>).

<b>Babies (0 – 18 months)</b>	<b>Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)</b>	<b>Young children (3 – 4 years)</b>	<b>Older children (5 – 7 years)</b>
Hide and seek games: hide a toy, ball or object under a cloth and let the baby find it.  Lap activities: hold the baby in your lap facing you and play 'peek-a-boo', 'pat-a-cake', fingerplay and other games with hand movements  Simple pretend games with props such as a doll and baby bottle  Talking and listening to baby	Active physical play and games like 'Follow the Leader'.  Action songs like 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', 'Hokey Pokey' and 'Incy Wincy Spider'.  Pretend play: children imitate familiar activities using simple props.  Matching and sorting games and puzzles	Movement songs and games with actions.  Obstacle courses  Pretend play with children taking on different roles of people in their families and communities.  Story-telling activities  Matching and sorting games according to more than one attribute; puzzles	Active physical play and games that require attention to detail; ball games; some organized sport such as soccer and netball.  Action songs and games with challenges such as singing in rounds, clapping different rhythms, songs that add on words or actions in each new verse  Board and card games with rules, guessing games, I spy.

## BINGO!

Find someone who is good at

Remembering phone numbers	Finishing a task once starting	Organising events
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____
Thinking before acting	Setting goals	Making use of other people's ideas
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____
Asking for help when needed	Controlling your emotions	Keeping track of more than one thing at a time
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____

### Activity : Play and executive function

Follow the facilitator's instructions and play "Bingo" with the Bingo sheet provided above.

The play activities in Table 2 above are developmentally appropriate ways to strengthen executive function skills:

- ◆ Working memory
- ◆ Inhibitory control
- ◆ Cognitive flexibility

Prepare a role play to demonstrate one of the activities for the age group that you have been assigned.

Present your activity to the group.

Discuss the kinds of executive function skills children will be developing.

## What is a play-based approach (PBA) to teaching and learning?

In recent years thinking about play has focused largely on the role of adults in children's play experiences. In a play-based teaching, teachers know that children learn through play in an active and playful environment. They make sure that the environment is right for learning and play an important role in supporting children's learning.

Importantly, they recognise that:

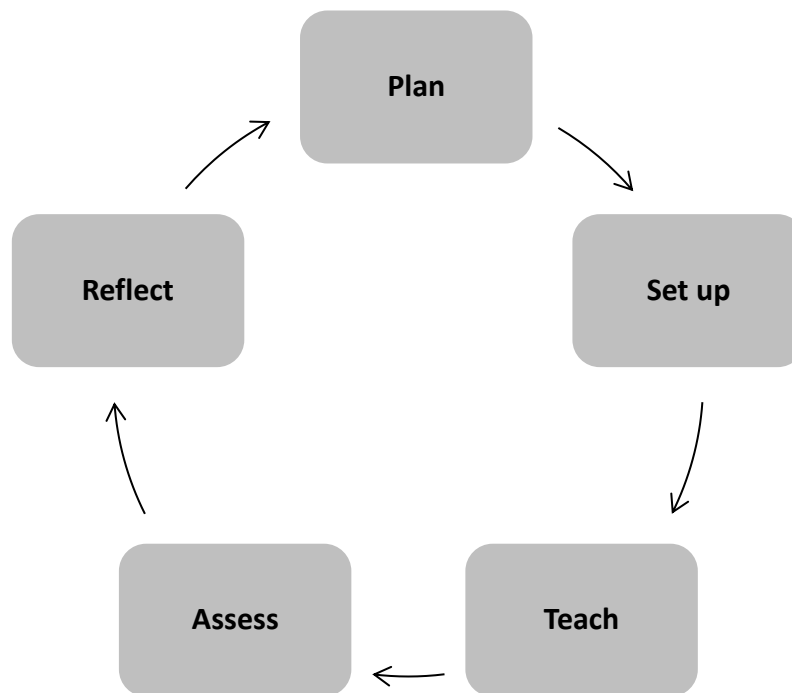
- ◆ Sometimes children learn best from free play activities that are initiated and directed by the child with support from the teacher. The child is free to choose their own materials and use them in their own way. The role of the teacher is to observe, join in the play and facilitate learning.
- ◆ Sometimes it is not possible for children to learn a concept or skill during free play, and the teacher needs to directly teach the skill or provide information. These teacher-directed activities need to be playful and support active and hands-on learning.

In play-based teaching and learning the teacher or caregiver

- ◆ **plans** playful activities that children can choose and decide for themselves how to play, as well as playful activities that are presented by the teacher (individual, small group and whole group activities)
- ◆ **sets up** a playful environment to support learning
- ◆ **teaches** children by
  - ◆ joining in and guiding their play
  - ◆ presenting and leading play activities to teach new knowledge or skills
- ◆ **assesses** children's learning during everyday activities as children play and learn.

- ◆ **reflects** on what has happened and adjusts where necessary and uses the reflection to help plan the next step

You can think of the play-based approach as a cycle with everything you need to do at key points in the cycle.



### Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle

#### Activity : A play-based approach

On your own, think about the following question:

- ◆ Do you think children learn everything they need to from play?

Follow the facilitator's instructions on how to get into pairs, 4s, and then groups of 8

In your final group, record your conclusions on flipchart paper.

Select one person to report back.

## D. PLAY CONTINUUM: WHO INITIATES/CHOOSSES AND WHO DIRECTS/CONTROLS THE PLAY?

### Purpose

The purpose of this section is for you to understand what a play continuum is and how play-based learning and teaching takes place through a continuum of play activities. It also introduces you to the levels of initiation and direction and how they determine the form of play on the play continuum.

### Learning outcomes

- ◆ Understand the idea of a play continuum<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ Understand the play continuum as a way of bringing together the many different ideas on play
- ◆ Understand how levels of choice and control describe forms of play
- ◆ Understand the importance of encouraging agency in children and ways in which teachers can foster agency
- ◆ Understand what enables optimal learning and ways in which teachers can encourage optimal learning

### Introduction

Three things help teachers to provide play-based learning activities for children:

1. Planning activities according to a set of play principles
2. Understanding the Play Continuum, and the different forms of play
3. Knowing how to implement play-based activities with children (we call this the PBA cycle of plan, set up, teach, assess and reflect).

### Understanding play as a continuum

#### What is a continuum?

A **continuum** is a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other but they lie somewhere between two different possibilities (merriam-webster.com).

---

<sup>1</sup> A 'continuum' can also be known as a 'spectrum'. In this guide the word 'continuum' has been used.



## What is a 'play continuum'?

- ◆ There are many ideas on what is play for young children. The idea of a 'play continuum' (Zosh et al, 2017) brings together these ideas by suggesting that play ranges (moves up and down) between four main forms of play:



### The play continuum

- ◆ No form of play is better or worse than another on the play continuum. All four forms of play contribute to a child's development.
- ◆ Playful instruction always contains elements of play. Examples of playful instruction are story, movement and music rings
- ◆ When children play they move from one form of play to another and back again on the play continuum. Here is an example:





*Five children are playing outside. The children are playing their own game running, climbing and jumping around the garden pretending to be butterflies. The teacher is supervising but doesn't interrupt the game (**free play**). After a while the teacher spots a teachable moment and intervenes by asking open-ended questions that gets the children talking and thinking about insects (**co-opted play**). The teacher puts out a mat with plastic insects, twigs and leaves (**co-opted play**). The children continue their game (**free play**). The teacher starts to plan how she can use the children's interest in butterflies to achieve the ELDA aims of the 0 - 4 years NCF curriculum. The teacher puts out drawing materials with paper cut into butterfly shapes. The children decide what colours and patterns to paint on the butterfly paper (**guided play**). At story time the teacher reads 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' and the children dramatize the stages of the butterfly's life cycle by following the teacher's actions (**playful instruction**).*

### How do we know the difference between each form of play on the play continuum?

The form of play is decided by:

1. who plans, chooses and starts the play activity. We call this initiation.
2. who organises and controls the play activity. We call this direction (Zosh et al. 2017).

The table below explains initiation and direction in more detail:

Child initiated play/Teacher initiated play	Child directed play/teacher directed play
<p><b>Who initiated (started) the play:</b> who planned, chose and decided what to do at the <u>beginning</u> of the game or play activity? Was it the teacher or the child/ren?</p> <p>If the play was started by the teacher we call it <u>teacher initiated play</u>.</p>  <p>If the play was started by a child or children we call it <u>child initiated play</u></p> 	<p><b>Who directed (controlled) the play:</b> who decided, organised and told the child/children what to do <u>during</u> the game or play activity? Was it the teacher or the child/children?</p> <p>If the play was controlled by the teacher we call it <u>teacher directed play</u></p>  <p>If the play was controlled by a child or children we call it <u>child directed play</u></p> 





There are different levels of initiated play and directed play.

### Levels of initiated and directed play

Level of <i>initiated</i> play	Level of <i>directed</i> play
<p>A <b>high level</b> of initiated play refers to who did <u>all or most</u> of the planning, deciding and choosing at the <u>start</u> of the game or play activity</p> <p>A <b>low level</b> of initiated play refers to who did <u>no, or little</u>, planning, deciding and choosing at the <u>start</u> of the game or play activity</p>	<p>A <b>high level</b> of directed play refers to who did <u>all or most</u> of the controlling, deciding and organizing <u>during</u> the play activity</p> <p>A <b>low level</b> of directed play refers to who did <u>no, or little</u>, controlling, deciding and organizing <u>during</u> the play activity</p>





We use alphabet letters to show the difference between high and low levels (we call this coding).

- ◆ the capital letters **C** (Child/Children) and **T** (Teacher) show a high level of initiated play and directed play.
- ◆ The small letters **c** (child/children) and **t** (teacher) show a low level of initiated play and directed play.

T	t	C	c
The <b>T</b> eacher did most of the initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The <b>t</b> eacher did very little initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The <b>C</b> hild (or children) did most of the initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The <b>c</b> hild (or children) did very little initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)
			

The table below puts it all together to show you how the four forms of play on the play continuum are determined by the levels of initiation and direction.

#### Four forms of play

 <p><b>Free Play</b></p> <p><b>C</b></p>	 <p><b>Co-opted Play</b></p> <p><b>Ct</b></p>	 <p><b>Guided Play</b></p> <p><b>Tc</b></p>	 <p><b>Playful Instruction</b></p> <p><b>T</b></p>
<p>The <b>C</b>hild initiated and directed <u>all</u> of the play. The <b>child</b> decided and organised when, where, what and how to play, and who is playing.</p> <p>The teacher did not intervene or engage with the playing children.</p>	<p>The <b>C</b>hild initiated and directed <u>most</u> of the play.</p> <p>The <b>t</b>eacher occasionally intervened in the children's play in order to extend the children's learning e.g. by asking a question, making a suggestion, or adding extra toys.</p>	<p>The <b>T</b>eacher initiated and directed <u>most</u> of the children's play by setting out specific play activities e.g. creative art time and obstacle course.</p> <p>The <b>c</b>hild had some control because the child could decide how to do the activity.</p>	<p>The <b>T</b>eacher initiated and directed <u>all</u> the play. The teacher planned the play activity with a particular purpose in mind e.g. a story that teaches listening skills.</p> <p>The child follows the teacher's direction.</p>

Although the four forms of play described above are separated into four clearly defined forms, it rarely happens that way in the classroom.

For example:

- ♦ **T** (Playful Instruction) becomes **Tc** (guided play) the minute the teacher encourages a child to share their ideas e.g. by asking 'What other animals are big?' and 'Look around the classroom. What can you see that is small'
- ♦ **C** (Free Play) becomes **Ct** (Co-opted play) the minute the teacher intervenes in the children's free play e.g. by making a suggestion or putting out extra toys.

### **Activity: Matching play activities to forms of play**

The facilitator will provide each small group with an envelope of statements describing different play activities for different aged children.



Using the template below place the statements provided to fill the blank spaces.



Discuss the following questions:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What makes Free Play different from all the other forms of play?
- ◆ What makes Co-opted Play different from all the other forms of play?
- ◆ What makes Guided Play different from all the other forms of play?

What makes Playful Instruction different from all the other forms of play?

The following template provides four examples of each form of play for different aged children.

<b>Example 1</b>	<b>Free Play</b>	<b>Co-opted Play</b>	<b>Guided Play</b>	<b>Playful Instruction</b>
	<b>C</b>	<b>Ct</b>	<b>Tc</b>	<b>T</b>
Babies 0-18 months 		The baby is sitting on the mat play with a baby doll. The carer sees an opportunity for learning. The carer sits next to the baby and talks to the baby 'Where is the baby's (doll) foot. Where is your foot? Here it is. Where is the baby's hand?		
<b>Example 2</b>	<b>Free Play</b>	<b>Co-opted Play</b>	<b>Guided Play</b>	<b>Playful Instruction</b>
	<b>C</b>	<b>Ct</b>	<b>Tc</b>	<b>T</b>
Toddlers 18-36 months 				The teacher plans and sets up an obstacle course inside. While helping the toddlers, the teacher observes who can or can't balance on the obstacles.

Example 3	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 yrs olds 36-60 months 	After snack time, the children go into the garden to play. The teacher observes but does not intervene unless there is a problem.			
Example 4	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Grade R 60-72 months 			The Grade R teacher asks each child to bring their favourite toy to school for the first week. At news time the children take turns to tell the class about their toy in their own words	

## Statements for the Grid

- ◆ The baby lies on the carpet playing with a soft toy. The carer is washing out a bottle while keeping an eye on the baby.
- ◆ At first break the Grade R children go outside to swing, slide and climb on the jungle gym. The Grade 7 monitor on duty in the playground does not interrupt the children's play
- ◆ After snack time, the preschool children go into the garden to play. The teacher observes but does not intervene unless there is a problem.
- ◆ The teacher is putting out snacks while watching the toddlers playing on the carpet.
- ◆ The baby is sitting on the mat play with a baby doll. The teacher sees an opportunity for learning.
- ◆ The preschool teacher plans an activity for ELDA 3 Communication: Aim 4. The activity is a drama ring that will help children to express their feelings. When the teacher holds up a picture of a happy/angry/sad or surprised face, the children all have to make sounds and actions that match that face.
- ◆ The carer moves the baby's arms and feet in time to music. This is a routine that the teacher does everyday with a different part of the baby's body. The teacher has planned this for ELDA 1 Aim 4: Children are physically strong and show abilities and interest in physical activities.
- ◆ The carer sits on the floor next to the baby and talks to the baby saying 'This is the foot?' Where is your foot?' The carer sings a song about the parts of the body and makes simple action movements with her body. The baby can either watch or join in.
- ◆ The playground monitor tells the Grade R teacher that some of the children are scared of the older children. The teacher sees a learning opportunity and facilitates a roleplay and discussion on bullying.
- ◆ The Grade R teacher asks each child to bring their favourite toy to school for the first week. At news time the children take turns to tell the class about their toy in their own words.
- ◆ The preschool children are playing in the fantasy corner. The teacher sees that one child is angry so she intervenes by asking the children 'I can see that Jo is not happy. What can we do to help Jo?'
- ◆ The preschool teacher puts out drawing paper and asks everyone to draw two things: something that makes them happy and something that makes them unhappy.
- ◆ The Grade R teacher plans a mathematics activity that targets the outcomes for CAPS Grade R mathematics. The children sort, match, count and draw conclusions using the favourite toys that they brought to class.
- ◆ The teacher sees that the toddlers all want to play with the same ball so she brings out extra balls.
- ◆ During outdoor time, the teacher starts a game by rolling or kicking the ball to the toddlers who want to play.
- ◆ The teacher plans an obstacle course for ELDA 1 Aim 4: Children are physically strong and show abilities and interest in physical activities. During ring time all the toddlers take a turn to do the obstacle course. The teacher takes notes on who can or can't balance.



### **Activity: Forms of play (video of children playing)**

Watch the video clips of children playing presented by the facilitator.

Discuss the following questions:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What play did you observe?
- ◆ Who planned and started the play (initiated play)?
- ◆ Who organized and controlled the play once it had started (directed play)?

### **Activity: Roleplaying four forms of play**

Each group will get a case study scenario from the facilitator plus some play materials.

The groups will prepare and present a roleplay based on their case study.

After each roleplay the facilitator will guide a reflection discussion by asking the students the following questions:

- ◆ What did you notice about the role play?
- ◆ What kind of play did you see?
- ◆ Who initiated and who directed the play activity in the roleplay?
- ◆ What would the children learn from this form of play?
- ◆ What links can you make with the curriculum?

Each student will then write in their journal:

- ◆ The name of one play activity at their early learning setting?
- ◆ What form of play this play activity is?
- ◆ Who initiates (plans, sets out and starts) this play activity'?
- ◆ Who directs (controls) this play activity?
- ◆ What will the children learn when they do this play activity?
- ◆ How does this play activity link to the curriculum?

The next part introduces the ideas of 'agency' and 'optimal learning'.

## Sharing choice and control during play facilitates agency and optimal learning

### Agency

#### What does agency mean?

**Agency** is ... a good feeling that comes when:

- ◆ you feel valued and appreciated by the people who are important to you, and
- ◆ you feel confident because you can:
  - ◆ make decisions
  - ◆ do things by yourself
  - ◆ control your environment
  - ◆ voice your ideas

#### Why do teachers need to foster (encourage) agency?

Children who experience agency are likely to grow into confident adults with a healthy self-esteem (a good feeling about themselves as capable and valued).

#### How can teachers help children to experience agency?

A teacher can:

1. provide opportunities for children to succeed.

This means planning activities that are interesting, enjoyable and a little challenging. If an activity is too easy or uninteresting the children will not experience meaningful success.

2. share control with the children

This does not letting children do anything they want. Sharing control means giving the children choices and involving the children in planning, organising and making decisions.

## Teachers sharing control with children

Ways in which a teacher can share control:	Examples
<p><b>Give children choices</b></p> <p><b>The choices should be simple and clear</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 'Today we have Marmite, fish paste and peanut butter sandwiches. You may choose which two kinds of sandwiches you would like to eat today'</li> <li>◆ 'Would you like to play the drum or the shakers today?'</li> <li>◆ 'We are painting today. What five colour paints shall we put out today?'</li> <li>◆ 'Which ten books should we put out in the book corner this week.'</li> </ul> <p>(Did you notice that each choice above is about things teachers do every day with the children? Did you also notice that each choice is limited by time (<i>today/this week</i>) and number (<i>two sandwiches, drum or shaker, five colours, ten books</i>)</p>
<p><b>Involve children in making decisions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 'Next month is our concert. Today we are going to choose songs to sing at the concert. Tell me your favourite songs. I will write them down and these will be the songs for our concert.'</li> <li>◆ 'Children – we have a problem that needs sorting out. There is a lot of fighting in the garden because everyone wants to ride on the scooters but there are only three scooters at our school. How can we solve the problem and stop the fighting? '</li> </ul>

### Activity: Sharing control with children

Each student:

- ◆ reads the checklist (below)
- ◆ decides which of the four statements are appropriate ways of sharing control
- ◆ make a ✓ next to the statements that are appropriate ways of sharing control with children
- ◆ make a X next to the statements that are inappropriate ways of sharing control with children

<b>Checklist:</b> sharing control with children	
1. The teacher says to a child: <i>'I can see you like looking at the books on transport. Do you think we should put the toy cars and trucks in the block corner today?'</i>	
2. The teacher says to a group of children: <i>'It's your turn to be in charge so you can decide what we are going to do this morning'.</i>	
3. The teacher says to the children: <i>'We are making our own sandwiches today. We have peanut butter, marmite, cucumber, cheese and polony. What would you like to put on your sandwich?'</i>	
4. The teacher says to the children: <i>'I can see you all want to talk about the butterfly you found in the garden today but we can't. This week the theme is Transport.'</i>	

### Questions list:

1. What is agency?
2. Why is fostering agency in children important?
3. How can we foster agency in children?
4. How can teachers share control with children?
5. What ideas do you have about sharing control with your children?

## Optimal learning

### What is optimal learning?

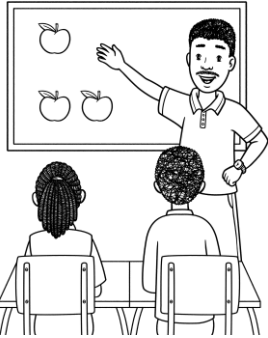

**Optimal learning** is ... is the best kind of learning. Optimal learning is closely linked to agency. This means that children learn best when they have a good feeling about themselves as somebody who is capable and valued.

### How can teachers encourage optimal learning?

For optimal learning to happen children must experience agency and be supported rather than directed ( Zosh et al., 2017).

The table below shows the difference between teachers supporting and teachers directing children.

#### Supporting and directing

	
<b>When teachers direct children:</b>	<b>When teachers support children:</b>
◆ The teacher is in control	◆ The teacher shares control with the children
◆ The children listen to the teacher	◆ The teacher listens to the children
◆ The children do what the teacher tells them to do	◆ The children are encouraged to share their ideas and experiences
◆ The teacher is responsible for solving problems and making decisions	◆ The teacher involves the children in solving problems and making decisions
◆ The children have few choices; they all do the same thing	◆ The children have many choices; they are encouraged to decide for themselves

Just as athletes need to exercise their muscles, so do children need to exercise their 'thinking and doing muscles' in order to learn (Zosh et al, 2017). Optimal learning (the best kind of learning) happens when teachers:

- ◆ Use a play-based approach (PBA) with children
- ◆ move away from telling children what to do and say
- ◆ move towards sharing control by offering children choices and involving them in making decisions

### **Activity: The moving game**

The students will identify and explain the differences between directing and supporting children.

The facilitator will read out one of the incomplete statements from the list of six below. Students should follow the instructions of the facilitator for the moving game.

#### **Statements:**

1. When the teacher tells the children what to do most of the time, the teacher is .....
2. When the teacher invites the children to help solve a problem, the teacher is .....
3. When the teacher tells the children to colour in a photocopied picture of a family, the teacher is .....
4. When the teacher asks the children to draw their own family, the teacher is .....
5. When the teacher expects the children to sit quietly at a table for most of the day, the teacher is .....
6. When the teacher asks open-ended questions that encourage the children to share their ideas, the teacher is .....

#### **Reflection:**

In pairs discuss the following questions:

- ◆ When is it a good time for a teacher to direct the children?
- ◆ What ideas do you have for supporting children?
- ◆ Could you do a moving game (like the one we have just played) with children?
- ◆ What would you need to do differently if you played a moving game with children?
- ◆ What would the children learn by playing a moving game?

Individually, students write for 5 minutes in their journals on the following topics:

- ◆ Ideas on how they can support optimal learning for the children they teach
- ◆ A moving game plan that they can do with their children

## E. HOW DO WE DO A PLAY-BASED (PBA) APPROACH?

### Purpose

This section covers the different elements that contribute to effective play-based teaching and learning including how to plan for it, set up the spatial and material environment, intentional teaching strategies, play-based assessment and the importance of reflection.

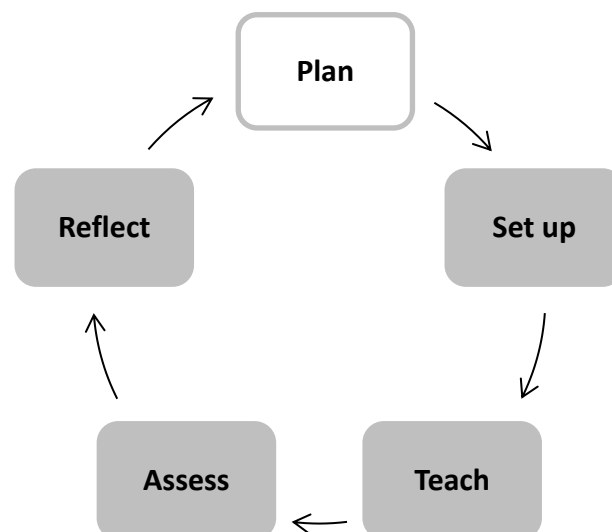
### Learning outcomes

- ◆ Understand that planning plays a critical role in the provision of quality play-based learning activities for children and how it supports optimal learning, classroom management and teaching satisfaction
- ◆ Understand that the two-part process of planning, including observing and preparing, are important first steps
- ◆ Consider the importance of setting up and resourcing an ECD environment to facilitate play-based learning
- ◆ Develop strategies for implementing play-based teaching in an ECD setting
- ◆ Learn about how to conduct play-based assessment
- ◆ Evaluate and reflect on teaching practice and use of the cycle to improve practice
- ◆ Collaboratively plan and reflect on learning to develop critical thinking problem solving and communication techniques in students

### Planning: How to plan play-based activities

#### What is planning?

Planning is the first step in the five step play-based teaching and learning cycle.



Play-based approach to teaching and learning- Plan

Here is a summary of the five steps in the cycle:

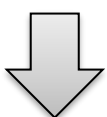
**1. Plan:**

Planning has two steps:

Step 1: the teacher first considers the children's needs, interests and the learning context before looking at the curriculum to see what the children need to learn.



Step 2: the teacher writes down a plan of how to teach the children. The plan takes into account what the teacher has found out in Step 1 about the children and the learning context.



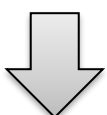
**2. Set up:**

The teacher gets ready. The teacher looks at the written planning to see what materials to prepare and how to set up the space where the learning activity will take place.



**3. Teach:**

The teacher puts the planning into action by doing the teaching /learning activity with the children.



**4. Assess:**

The teacher checks to see if the children understand and can do what the learning activity taught them.

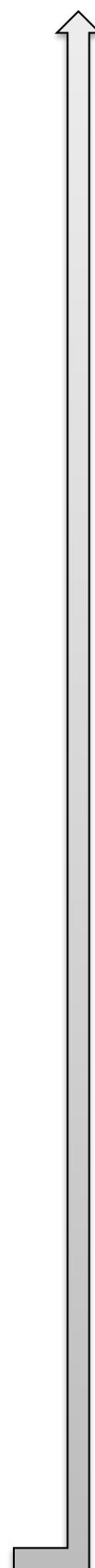


**5. Reflect:**

After the learning activity the teacher thinks about:

- ◆ What worked well when I did the learning activity? Why did it work well?
- ◆ What didn't work well? Why didn't it work well?
- ◆ What do I need to do differently next time?

The teacher returns to Step 1 and starts planning again. This time the teacher's planning is informed by the assessment findings and the reflection.





## **Why do teachers plan?**

Planning is good for teachers and children. When teachers plan using a play-based approach we are sure to see:

- ◆ Happy and relaxed teachers who look forward to their day of teaching because they are well-prepared.
- ◆ Happy children who look forward to coming to school because the teachers are happy and relaxed and the learning activities are well-prepared.
- ◆ Fewer discipline problems because all the children are actively engaged in well-prepared activities.
- ◆ The children experience optimal (the best) learning because the teachers have been intentional (careful and purposeful) when planning and are well prepared.

**Teachers planning = optimal learning**

## **How do teachers plan?**

Planning is a two-step process:

- ◆ Step 1: Preparing (getting ready) for planning
- ◆ Step 2: Implementing (doing) the planning

### **STEP 1: Preparing for Planning**

Teachers prepare for planning by finding information that will help them to plan effectively (better). Teachers find this information in three ways by:

1. Observing the children
2. Looking at the curriculum
3. Considering the learning context

Let's take a closer look at how teachers prepare for planning in these three ways:

#### **1. Observing the children**

The teacher observes the children to find out:

What the children already **know** e.g. their name, age, numbers 1 - 6, how to share, what is a healthy food, the names of animals, the names of parts of their body etc.

What the children can **do** e.g. hop on one leg, draw a person, kick a ball, feed and dress themselves, listen with attention, match shapes, complete a puzzle etc.

What the children are **interested in** e.g. animals, books, playing with friends, water and sand play, building with blocks, creative art, singing etc.



## 2. Looking at the curriculum

The teacher looks at the curriculum to find out:

What must the children learn?

- ◆ If the Children are in Grade R, the teacher looks at the Grade R CAPS curriculum.
- ◆ If the children are in a programme for 0 – 4 year olds, the teacher looks at the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework.



## 3. Considering the context

The teacher considers the learning context to find out:

What is affecting the children's learning? What is blocking a child's ability to learn e.g. poverty and stress?

What resources and opportunities are available e.g. who can donate materials, what can parents and carers do to support their children's learning, and can the community library provide storybooks?

What values are important to the parents, carers and the community?



**Observing the children** as the first step in planning.

### Activity: Observation Game

Play this **Observation Game** in the following way:

- ◆ Each student finds a partner and they stand together 1 metre apart facing each other.
- ◆ Each student looks closely at their partner without moving for 30 seconds.
- ◆ Each pair turn around and stand back to back without touching each other.
- ◆ Each student quietly makes one change to their appearance e.g. switches a watch to the other arm, takes off a earring, rolls up a sleeve, undoes a button, turns up a collar.
- ◆ When each person has made one change, the facilitator will ask the students to turn and face their partners again.
- ◆ Each student observes their partner again and identifies the change that has been made.
- ◆ The game is repeated four more times with the same partner.



**Reflection:**

The students will discuss the following open-ended questions:

- ◆ What did you notice about observing?
- ◆ How do teachers observe children?
- ◆ Why do teachers observe children?
- ◆ Why is it a good idea for teachers to observe the children before planning?

**Application:**

With the whole class, discuss the following:

- ◆ How could you play the observation game with children?
- ◆ What would you need to do differently?
- ◆ What would the children learn by playing the observation game?
- ◆ How does playing the observation game link with the curriculum?

**Activity PART 1:****Observing a child**

- ◆ The students prepare for the observation
- ◆ Each student observes one child at an ECD site/school using an observation form

**Activity PART 2:****Reflection on the observation**

- ◆ The students reflect on the information forms
- ◆ The students draw conclusions on how observing informs planning

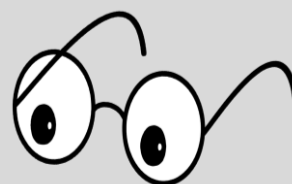
**Activity: Child Observation: PART 1**

Use the observation form provided below.

Watch the videoclip of a child at play

**2. Observing a child**

The facilitator will show the video clip and the students take notes about what they see on the observation form.



The observation checklist for Activity. PART 1:

The observation form which is completed by the student while they are observing the video of a child playing in an ECD setting.

**Activity Part One: Observation Form**

Child 1.....	Child 2 .....
1. What was the child doing? What did you observe about what s/he already knows, can do or anything that showed what s/he was thinking or feeling?	
2. What seemed to interest the child, what did s/he enjoy doing?	
3. Was there anything the child found difficult or challenging? (e.g. does the child find it difficult to listen and pay attention, have a special need)	

Activity PART 2 is a follow up reflection session that takes place after students have completed their observation form.

### **Activity: PART 2: Reflection**

#### **Purpose:**

- ◆ To help students understand that observing children leads to planning optimal learning activities .

Whole Group. **Movement Game:**

Follow the facilitator's instructions.

Whole Group. **Talking Wheel:**

Follow the facilitator's instructions.

#### **Questions for the Talking Wheel activity:**

1. How will knowing what children know, can do and feel help a teacher to plan?
2. How will knowing what interests and excites children help a teacher to plan?
3. How will knowing what challenges and influences children help a teacher to plan?
4. What are the benefits (good things) for children when teachers prepare for planning?
5. What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning?
6. What happens when a teacher does not prepare for planning?

#### **Application:**

The students think about:

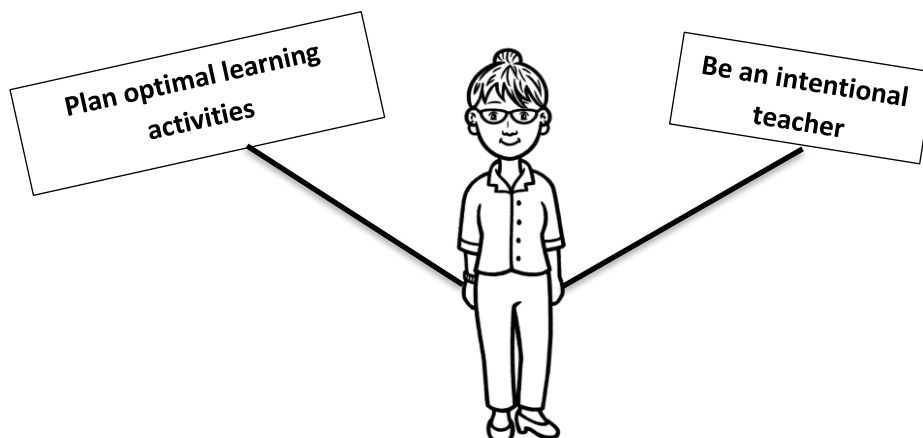
- ◆ How could you play the movement game with children?
- ◆ What would you need to change or do differently with children?
- ◆ What would the children learn from playing the movement game?
- ◆ What links can you make between children playing the movement game and the curriculum?



When teachers have completed Step 1 (preparing for planning), they are ready for Step 2 (doing the planning).

## STEP 2: Doing the planning

This section shows students two effective ways to plan:



### 1. Planning optimal learning activities

Teachers want their children to experience optimal learning. Teacher also want to know what kind of activities will result in optimal learning. Optimal learning happens when teachers plan activities that ...

- ◆ are fun for children
- ◆ are meaningful for the children
- ◆ actively involve all the children
- ◆ are done many times in different ways
- ◆ get children to play and work together

(Zosh et al, 2017)

### 2. Planning with intention

Teachers understand that everything they say and do impacts (has an effect) on the children they teach. Teachers need to ask themselves:

- ◆ why am I doing this activity with the children?
- ◆ what will the children learn by doing this activity?

Teachers who plan with a clear aim in mind are sure to have a positive impact on the children. We call this being intentional. Being intentional means that teachers plan activities according to the characteristics of activities that lead to optimal learning.

This means that each activity:

- ◆ is fun for the children
- ◆ is meaningful for the children
- ◆ actively involves all the children
- ◆ is done many times in different ways with the children
- ◆ encourages children to play and work together
- ◆ fulfills the curriculum aims

Children experience **optimal learning** when teachers **plan activities with intention**.

The case study of Ms Blue and Ms Green will help you to find answers to the following questions:

- ♦ What does intentional planning look like?
- ♦ Why is it important to be an intentional teacher?

### Activity: Intentional teaching Case study



Ms Blue and Ms Green are preschool teachers. Although Ms Blue and Ms Green teach the same age group and use the same 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework aims, their activities are very different. By looking at how each teacher plans, we understand what it means to be an intentional teacher and how to plan optimal learning activities.

#### Resources:

- ♦ Copies of Ms Blue and Ms Green's planning (copy of each is provided below).
- ♦ Large picture book with pictures of the five senses
- ♦ A4 blank white paper and crayons
- ♦ Storybook (or rhyme or song) about copying
- ♦ Newsprint and markers to make the following poster:

	Ms Green	Ms Blue
Was the activity fun for the children?		
Was the activity meaningful for the children?		
Did the activity actively involve all the children		
Was the activity done in different ways with the children		
Did the activity encourage children to play and work together		

**Background information:**

'Ms Blue and Ms Green each teach a class of 4-5 year olds at the local preschool. Ms Blue and Ms Green have both planned a group activity according to the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework's Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1: Children listen to sounds and speeches. Although Ms Blue and Ms Green used the same planning form and have the same aim i.e. *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches*, their planning and the children's learning is quite different'.

- ◆ Prepare a role play with Ms Blue and Ms Green and their children'
- ◆ Each group takes a turn to present their 2 – 3 minute role play to the other group.

**Reflection:**

1. After the Ms Green role play the facilitator asks the observing students:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What did Ms Green's children learn?
- ◆ Did Ms Green's planning realise the curriculum aim: *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches*? How?
- ◆ Answer YES or No to the following questions for Ms Green:

	Ms Green	Ms Blue
Was the activity fun for the children?		
Was the activity meaningful for the children?		
Did the activity actively involve all the children?		
Was the activity done in different ways with the children?		
Did the activity encourage children to play and work together?		

2. After the Ms Blue role play the facilitator asks the observing students:

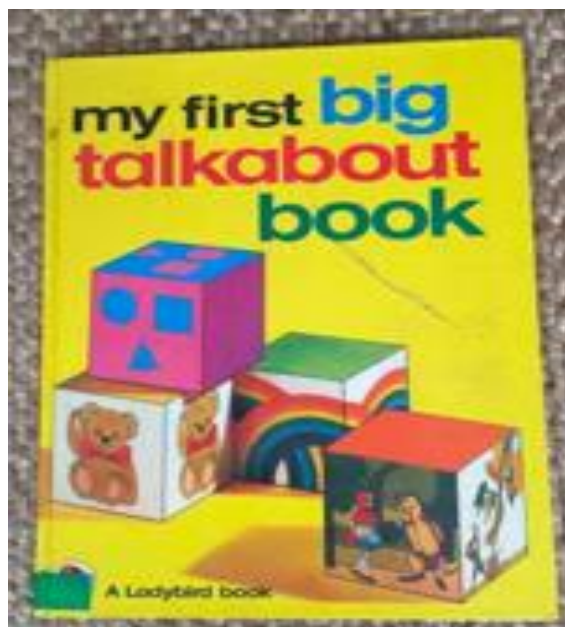
- ◆ What did you notice?
  - ◆ What did Ms Blue's children learn?
  - ◆ Did Ms Blue's planning realise the curriculum aim: *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches*? How?
  - ◆ The facilitator points to the poster and asks the students the same five questions.
  - ◆ They fill in YES or NO for Ms Blue.
3. Once reflections 1 and 2 are completed, the facilitator invites all the students to compare the columns on the newsprint. The facilitator asks:
- ◆ What do you see?
  - ◆ Which activity do you think will lead to optimal learning?
  - ◆ Why is Ms Blue's planning more effective?

What advice could you give to Ms Green?



The planning for Ms Blue and Ms Green is below. Note that each offers alternative ways to do the planned activity. Use the option that suits your context.

### Planning: Ms Green



Date: 21<sup>st</sup> May

Teacher: Ms Green

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1: *Children listen to sounds and speeches*

Resources: *My First Big Talkabout Book*. A Ladybird book. If this (or a similar book) is not available then use one of the following:

- ◆ Google and print images of the five senses. Staple together to make a book.
- ◆ Google images of the five senses and create a Powerpoint slideshow
- ◆ Use objects. Find 5 open medium-sized boxes. Label box 1 'I hear with my ears'. Label Box 2 'I see with my eyes'. Label Box 3 'I feel with my skin'. Label Box 4 'I taste with my tongue'. Label Box 5 'I smell with my nose'. Fill each box with five items that relate to the sense on the label. Ask the same questions using the objects instead of pictures.

**Activity:**

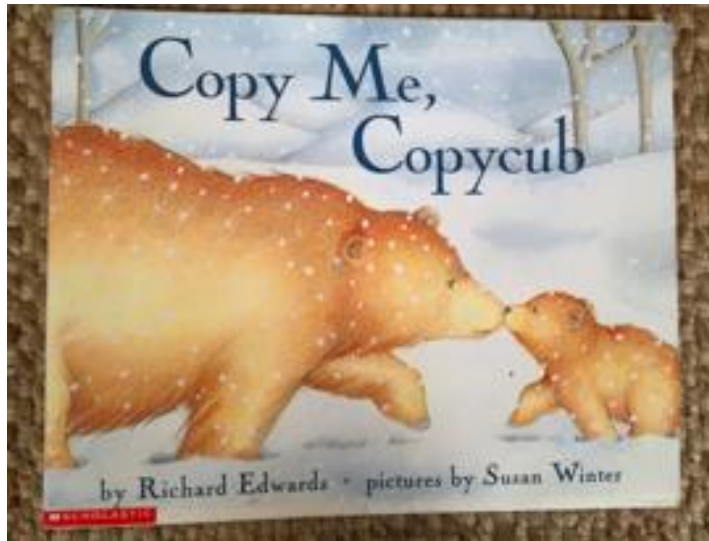
1. Ms Green tells the children that it is now story time and everyone must sit quietly on the mat with their hands in their laps.
2. Ms Green holds up the *My First Big Talkabout Book* and asks the children 'What do you see?' Ms Green reads out the title of the book pointing and showing the children which word she is reading.
3. Ms Green reminds the children that the theme for the week is 'My Senses' and asks the children 'What are the names of the five senses'.

4. Ms Green asks five questions which the children answer by pointing to the correct body part:
  - ◆ 'Show me what part of our body we use to touch?'
  - ◆ 'Show me what part of our body we use to see?'
  - ◆ 'Show me what part of our body we use to taste?'
  - ◆ 'Show me what part of our body we use to hear?'
  - 'Show me what part of our body we use to smell?'
5. Ms Green opens the book and shows the children the following pages on the senses:



6. Ms Green asks the children the following questions for each page:
  - ◆ 'What sense do we use here?'
  - ◆ 'What is this?' (Ms Green points to some of the pictures on the page)
7. Ms Green hands each child a blank paper and asks the children to sit at the table and to draw the five senses.

## Planning: Ms Blue



Date: 21<sup>st</sup> May

Teacher: **Ms Blue**

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1: *Children listen to sounds and speeches*

Resources: Storybook: *Copy Me, Copycub*. If this (or a similar book) is not available then use one of the following:

- ◆ look on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2liqiHzu31c> for the *Copy Me, Copycub* story.
- ◆ read another storybook or make up your own story with a 'copy me' theme.
- ◆ say a rhyme which has 'copy me' actions e.g. 'Simon says ...'
- ◆ play the 'Broken Telephone' game.

Special needs: Siya is hard of hearing so he sits near his teacher to see the story book pictures and lip read. Ms Blue will also use her hands and face in expressive ways to help Siya understand the story.

### **Activity:**

1. Ms Blue sits the children in a ring on the carpet making sure that she can see everyone's face.
  2. Ms Blue reads *Copy Me Copycub* to the children and shows them the pictures.
  3. Ms Blue holds her arms up high and says 'Copy me'. Ms Blue plays the 'Copy me' game by asking the children to take turns to do something that everyone copies.
  4. Ms Blue tells the children 'I am going to make some sounds and then you are going to copy the sounds I make'. Ms Blue makes the following sounds. After each sound the children copy the sound Ms Blue made.
- ◆ Hello how are you?
  - ◆ Molweni. Ninjani?

- ◆ Goeiemôre. Hoe gaan dit?
- ◆ oooo
- ◆ ssss
- ◆ bbbb
- ◆ Hooray Hooray for today.
- 5. Ms Blue invites the children to each make their own sound or word or sentence for the group to copy. The children each take a turn to make a sound or say something that the other children copy.
- 6. Ms Blue asks all the children to lie down and shut their eyes as if they are sleeping. Ms Blue tells the children that when they hear the 'k' sound they wake up and go outside to play. Ms Blue makes the following letter sounds:
  - ◆ o
  - ◆ e
  - ◆ m
  - ◆ k

### **Activity : Planning optimal learning**

The students will work together as intentional teachers to plan optimal learning activities for babies, toddlers, 3 – 4 year old, and 4 - 5 year old children.

Each group will present their planning to the other students.

#### **Resources:**

- ◆ profiles of four different age groups (a copy is provided below).
- ◆ four planning templates (a copy is provided below).

Each group has 20 minutes to:

- ◆ read their profile
- ◆ plan an optimal learning activity for their age group which:
  - ◆ links to the curriculum
  - ◆ is fun for the children
  - ◆ is meaningful for the children
  - ◆ actively involves all the children
  - ◆ is done many times in different ways with the children
  - ◆ encourages children to play and work together
- ◆ decide how to present their planned activity to the other students for 2 – 3 minutes.

Each group of students takes a turn to present their planned activity to the other groups.

#### **Reflection**

Whole class discusses:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What tell us that the activity will lead to optimal learning?
- ◆ How could you do the activity with your children?

### **Profile 1: Babies**

**Name of the group:** Giraffes

**Age of children:** 0 - 17 months

#### **Special needs and challenges:**

- ◆ Ben is a very 'floppy' baby and doesn't show any sign of wanting to crawl even though he is 10 months old.
- ◆ Maselele is very attached to one particular teacher and doesn't want anyone else to pick her up or feed her.

#### **Babies' interests:**

- ◆ The babies love music.
- ◆ The babies respond positively when they see another baby.

#### **Home and community context:**

Five of the six babies are parented by single mothers who work. The grandparents live nearby and help the mothers. None of parents in the babies group seem to know each other. They are in too much of a rush to get to work.

#### **Opportunities for learning:**

- ◆ The principal has just made some long pillows for the baby room.
- ◆ Two of the grandmothers have offered to come and help at school. One grandpa plays the guitar.

### **Profile 2: Toddlers**

**Name of the group:** Lions

**Age of children:** 18 – 30 months

#### **Special needs and challenges:**

- ◆ Rita is new to the class and hasn't bonded with her teacher yet.
- ◆ Ntombi wants to be picked up and carried around all the time.

#### **Toddlers' interests:**

- ◆ The theme for the week is 'My busy body'.
- ◆ The toddlers love messy play.

#### **Home and community context of the children:**

The families come from well-resourced homes where most of the mothers are stay-at-home moms who don't work. Many of the fathers commute and work in another city; they seldom attend school functions and parents' meetings.

#### **Opportunities for learning:**

The teachers have been on a course on how to make toys from waste materials.

### **Profile 3: 3 - 4 year olds**

**Name of the group:** Rhinos

**Age of children:** 3 – 4 year olds

#### **Special needs and challenges:**

- ◆ Musi is in a wheelchair but he loves to take part in the activities.
- ◆ Robert is very boisterous and tends to be rough with the younger children.
- ◆ Nabeela can't see very well and needs to wear her glasses all the time.

#### **Children's interests:**

- ◆ The theme for the week is 'Insects'.
- ◆ Musi's mother brought in a dead butterfly for everyone to see.
- ◆ It is nearly Easter and the children are all talking about the Easter bunny.

#### **Home and community context of the children:**

The children come from an area that is rife with gangsterism. The parents say they are scared of the gangs and keep their children safely inside all the time. The parents are not keen to attend school functions after work. The parents say that educating their children is a priority for them.

#### **Opportunities for learning:**

Kaylin's father brought six balls as a gift for the Rhino class.

### **Profile 4: 4 – 5 year olds**

**Name of the group:** Zebras

**Age of children:** 4 -5 year olds

#### **Special needs and challenges:**

- ◆ Siswe is deaf in one ear.
- ◆ Mohamed is very active and finds it difficult to sit and listen without being distracted.
- ◆ Marie does not know her colours yet.
- ◆ Yonela is very clever and curious.

#### **Children's interests:**

- ◆ The theme for the week is 'Wild Animals'.
- ◆ The children love action stories, drama and moving to music.

#### **Home and community context of the children:**

Most of the children come from family-orientated homes where the parents live together in their own houses close to the school. Many of the parents know each other and socialise by getting together for a braai on the weekend. The parents view education as the road to success in life.

#### **Opportunities for learning:**

The game reserve is close by and the school can afford transport. One of the fathers is a game ranger.

The following blank planning form is for the above activity.

## **Planning**

Date: Teacher:

Children's ages:

Curriculum:

Resources:

Activity:

**Planning is the foundation of great teaching and learning.**

## Set up for play-based learning

Preparation is at the heart of any good teaching. Preparing an interesting, stimulating and playful classroom environment where children can play to learn is no different.

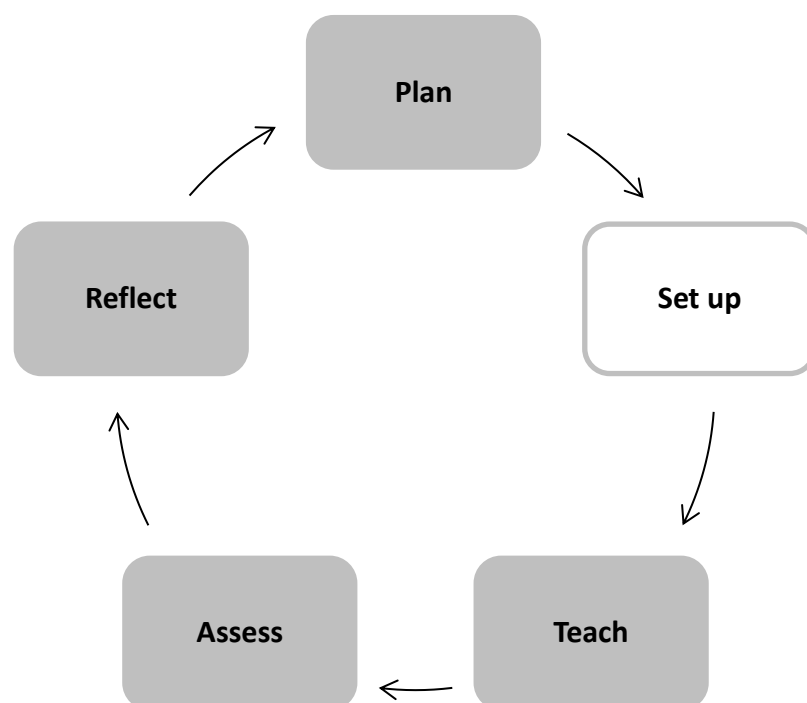
As teachers, we need to plan play-based learning well. In order to do so we have to very carefully 'set up' or prepare the environment for the children to play in. Using a play-based-approach to learning means that the environment itself must encourage and support children's play as part of their and your daily programme.

Both NELDS (National Early Learning Development Standards for children birth to four years) and The CAPS document for Life Skills in the Foundation Phase say that opportunities for active play are very important for young children in an ECD environment.

There is a cycle that we can follow that can help us prepare a good play-based learning environment.

The cycle is:

1. setting up/preparation of the environment,
2. working in it with the children and allowing them to be active partners,
3. observing and thinking about if our environment did actually encourage and support play-based learning for our children, and then
4. setting up the environment again, but this time based on the ideas and changes that our thinking tells us are needed.



**Play-based approach to teaching and learning-Set up**



We know that the classroom environment is much more than what we see.

The important things that lie behind a classroom environment that tries to support play-based learning are:

- a) the good quality of teacher-to-child relationships,
- b) the quality of play and learning experiences that the teacher has made available for children, and
- c) what the teacher him/herself thinks about how learning grows and develops in children

The first very important setting up of a play-based environment is in the teacher's own attitudes. What s/he thinks about the idea of play-based learning, how she sees the children, and how s/he sees her/himself as the facilitator of play-based learning will make a difference to the ways in which s/he goes about preparing the learning environment.

Our starting point for play-based learning must be how we as teachers see children. What image they have of children is the starting point.

A teacher might see the child as someone who must wait for the teacher before doing any activity. The teacher might see the child as someone who cannot take control of a play situation and direct it themselves. The teacher might see the child as someone who cannot make choices about play.

Such a teacher will set up a learning space that is limiting for the child in many ways. It is not going to be a space that will help the child to learn through play.

On the other hand, the teacher might believe and trust that children can learn actively by freely playing with materials and working with teachers in play. The teacher might believe that learning in this way is a partnership. The teacher might believe that play is a powerful learning tool for children.

This teacher will set up a very different kind of classroom.

Imagine this example of two very different environments.

It is the beginning of a school day, and the children are expected very soon. There are two classroom environments ready for them.

**Environment 1**

There is a classroom with desks and chairs arranged in it, in clusters. The toys are all neatly packed away in boxes, nothing is left out on the floors or tables, which are bare. The teacher's table is quite dominant in the room. There are some charts and picture on the walls. The outside environment is equally clean and neat, with no toys visible. The sandpit is covered. The teacher is on her cellphone at her desk.

**Environment 2**

The classroom is an area in which toys and games are laid out ready for children to play with. There are things like blocks, crayons, paper, recycled materials such as empty bottles, boxes and tins laid out ready. A picture of a building is on the carpet next to some blocks. Through the door to the outside there is a pile of sand with some old tin cups and plates in it, and perhaps a spade. The teacher is seated next to the door on a small chair welcoming children in.

The teacher's table is in a corner against the wall.

In these two pictures it is clear which one is set up for play, where children may feel invited to start playing with things. The other is clearly more set up for the teacher's benefit, and although it may look attractive, it is not really inviting children to play. They both tell us what the teachers believe about children and play. Think about your own ECD setting. How does it reflect your ideas about children's learning and play?

We can clearly see the teachers' understanding of different types of play that children need to engage in, and the teacher's own choices about what roles s/he will play during play with children, in the way this teacher has set up the learning environment.

The learning environment is therefore a kind of mirror which reflects what the teacher thinks about children's learning, and about how this teacher plans for play-based learning.

So, let us assume that we want to give children a learning experience based on play.

We understand that we will be facilitators in this learning.

There are a number of things to think about when we set up a space for play-based learning.

We will consider them under the following headings.

- i) The physical environment, which includes outdoors as well as indoors
- ii) The psychological or emotional environment, how it feels for the child
- iii) The materials placed in the environment

But first, it is useful to think about some general points.

**General**

- ◆ A learning environment is where both teachers and children will spend a lot of time, and so it needs to be a place that everyone who uses it can relate to it. Learning environments should be nurturing spaces that support the development of all children.
- ◆ How the environment for play-based learning is set up generally directs the way play will happen in the environment, and how children might direct their play, both inside the classroom and outdoors.
- ◆ Set up plays an important role in the way children feel about play. It affects how they behave towards one another. It affects how they communicate with one another in play partnerships, and it affects how they engage in play.

- ◆ All environments available to the child can support children's learning - the outside as well as the inside environment is important to think about.
- ◆ Even when play is 'free', with children deciding what and how to play, the space, the materials and the people to play with provide a certain structure which is important for teachers to think about.
- ◆ The environment should reflect of the culture that the child lives in which makes them feel understood and safe, as well as giving children the opportunity to extend and explore in many directions in their play.

(Kritchevsky, Prescott, & Walling, 1977; Loughling & Suina, 1982).

## Physical environment

Environment can be defined as the physical environment, its surroundings, and a specific setting or context.

Here are some of the principles that should be considered in the physical setting up of a play-based learning environment.

### Indoors

1. It should be light, well organised with noisy and quiet areas separated and as much room as possible for children to move around in and play in different ways.
2. There should be things in it that are **recognisable** to the child and to the teachers
3. The size of the space, but more importantly how the space is used, and how things are arranged within it, both indoors and outdoors will have an effect on children's freedom to choose their own activities. This will then have an effect on whether or not they extend and expand their play, how far they can use it to explore an idea, for example, and whether they can engage in different kinds of play. How space is designed encourages or discourages ongoing developing play. Small, squashed, badly designed play areas can make children irritable and uncomfortable, and do not allow them to put their energies into their activities.
4. Flexibility is also important. What works for one group of children may not work for another, and children need changes to keep them interested and focussed. In this sense the design of the early learning environment is never complete, but changes all the time as the children learn and as their needs change.
5. Different learning spaces can be very useful. Some play activities are better for large groups, other are better explored in smaller groups or in one-to-one partnerships, so allowing spaces for large group, small group and individual play opportunities and areas where activities can be left out and returned to later are important in terms of layout. Children are different in their own needs and learning styles. Each space within the bigger overall space of the early learning space, should also be considered in a way that invites children in, and encourages engagement with the play materials.

## Outdoors

1. Setting up an outdoor environment is just as important, however small or limited it may be. Teachers need to give children the opportunity to play with toys or objects and materials or games, in the same way as those indoors. Working with outdoor materials such as sand, water, ropes, boxes, sticks and so on, are opportunities that extend the child's engagement in play, and provide different interesting play opportunities. Bringing outside, things such as construction materials that are normally considered to belong inside, can extend a child's learning environment. Thinking about moving things between the two environments, either for a short time, or for long periods can help teachers to think more carefully about the two different environments and what play opportunities they can offer children.
2. Indoor and outdoor kinds of play can be thought of as complementary to, or helping one another. Children using the outdoor space, however small, can play in a way that helps them to explore and ask questions and to think about things that they can then take indoors to different play activities and materials to try out in a different way. For example a child who is playing a balancing game on a plank, exploring what her/his own body does, may take the idea of balance inside, and work with it and extend it in her /his next construction activity with blocks.

## Emotional environment

It is as important to think beyond the physical aspects of the early learning environment to 'emotional safety'. A child who feels welcomed, secure and has his/her emotional needs met is more able to pay attention, and to give positive energy to playing, and therefore to learning and developing

### Activity: A welcoming learning environment

Students need to think of their own cultural, social and family background, and imagine that they are setting up a welcoming learning environment for children from the same background as their own.

They are to think of 5 things they would do to make this environment as welcoming as possible. They are to give reasons for their choices. For example, maybe a teacher wants to have a small jar of flowers on a table near the door because s/he knows that most children don't see flowers at home and will be interested in them. Students are to think of furniture, play materials, the arrangement of spaces within the environment, what might be on the walls, and so on. Think about how they would like the child to **feel** on entering that space, NOT on how or what the children might play with.

You have 10 minutes to do this.

Some students will share their ideas with the whole group. The discussion afterwards will focus on the reasons behind the choices, looking closely at i) the differences between these learning environments, and (ii) things that are the same, all from the point of view of the way children might feel when entering and working in this environment.

### **Materials, objects, games and resources**

1. Play environments should contain materials that encourage and support different kinds of play,. The teacher needs to think carefully about how the materials support and encourage children to think, to socialise with one another, and to develop emotionally, and physically. (Catron & Allen, 2007).
2. Children must be able to access the materials. Can all children easily get to the materials Can the materials be left out for some time if the play is an activity that children need to come back to (for example constructing a house or a village with blocks)?
3. Materials that can be used for many kinds of play, and not just one kind of play are the ones teachers should be most interested in. So toys like a puzzle can only be done in one way. Puzzles are important, but toys like blocks can be used in many ways by children, to do many different things.
4. We want play materials that invite children to play and encourage and help them to think. We want enough materials that can be used in many different ways and that give children opportunities to be creative. We want materials that help children to learn about one another and to play together and with their teachers We want materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the children and facilitates participation of children with different abilities.
5. We need to think carefully about how many materials are in the environment at any one time. Not having enough materials, and different kinds of materials limits ability to play, and can lead to boredom. But having too many materials can confuse children, and make them less interested in learning. With the right number of materials available, teachers can spend more time engaging and playing with their children, and less time trying to control behaviour and keep good order.
6. On a practical level, teachers need to think if the materials can be easily handled by the children? Are they safe for children? Are they easily put away, stored and cleaned?
7. New materials need to be brought into the learning environment to from time to time, to expand children's learning, or encourage a new direction in play. Change materials that no longer interest children.

By observing and paying close attention to how children play, teachers will see what is needed:

- ◆ How are the children responding to the materials?
- ◆ Are they excited and interested?
- ◆ How do they use the materials?
- ◆ How long do they play?
- ◆ How do they extend their play with the use of the materials?
- ◆ How are the materials affecting children's friendships, the way they play together?

It can be useful to use the following checklist to help you make decisions about whether your ECD environment is well set up for play-based learning. The brief checklist can be used in any environment at any time, and additional questions can be added.

Things to think about in the ECD setting / classroom	Yes or No
<b>Stand at the door of your ECD setting/ classroom.</b> Does the room look inviting for the children? Have you got some things in it that they will recognise and be happy to see?	
<b>Do you think children will be physically comfortable there?</b> Are there spaces for them to move around in? Are there different play areas to cater for individual, paired and group play?	
<b>Get down to child's height and look at your room again.</b> How does it look from a child's eye point of view? Are the play materials within reach? Can the children see things to play with?	
<b>Go outside.</b> Does your outside area look inviting for the children? Can they move around comfortably? Are there things there that will make them want to be outside? Is it safe?	

Thinking about these things will help a teacher to think about whether his/her classroom is well set up for play-based teaching and learning.

To summarise how to set up a play-based learning environment, we are going to do a design activity. Before we do so, let us think back to the principles of play that were outlined in an earlier section. These are:

- ◆ Play is intentional
- ◆ Play demands that children be active
- ◆ Play is fun
- ◆ Children make choices about their play activities
- ◆ Children can lead, direct and control their own play activities.
- ◆ Play is meaningful in that it offers opportunities for children to come to terms with and create meaning about their world
- ◆ Play is communicative.
- ◆ Play is a process.

For a learning environment to be fully set up for play-based learning, we need to make sure that these principles are followed.

### **Activity 7.6: Dream space**

You have been given the chance to set up a pre-school class for 5 year old children. You are the designers of the space, and can put into it whatever you feel is best for your particular context. This is to be a play-based classroom.

You should think about your ideal classroom, the one all teachers dream of, and there are no limits in terms of what you can design.

In groups of 3 or 4 people, draw a plan of this dream classroom and clearly mark everything you wish to put in it.

In designing this dream space for play-based learning, you might find it useful to:

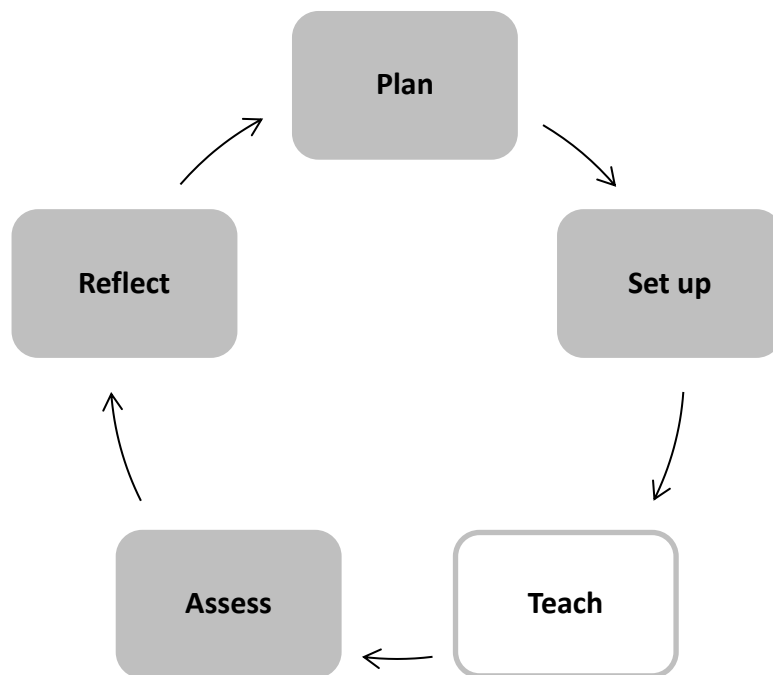
1. Use the principles of play (above) as a tool for design
2. Ask yourselves some questions about the physical environment (indoors and outdoors), the emotional environment and the materials, what you would like to put into your environment.

These questions may help:

- i) What is in my space(s)?
- ii) Why is it there? Do I think it will be of interest to the children? Does it help children think about the kinds of play that they may like to try with it? Does it invite and support children's play?
- iii) Where is it? Have I placed it in a particular place, and if so, why?
- iv) Who can get to it?
- v) What kind of play do I want to encourage with this material?
- vi) What else can I offer children as an invitation to play?

You have 30 minutes to prepare your design.

## Teaching in a play-based approach



### A play-based approach to teaching and learning - Teach

#### Purpose

This session looks at how teachers help children learn as they interact with them during both child-directed and teacher-directed play activities.

#### Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- ◆ Increase their understanding of the different ways to facilitate learning through play
- ◆ Describe how scaffolding children's play extends their thinking and learning
- ◆ Explore ways to scaffold learning during child-directed and teacher-directed activities.

#### Teaching through play

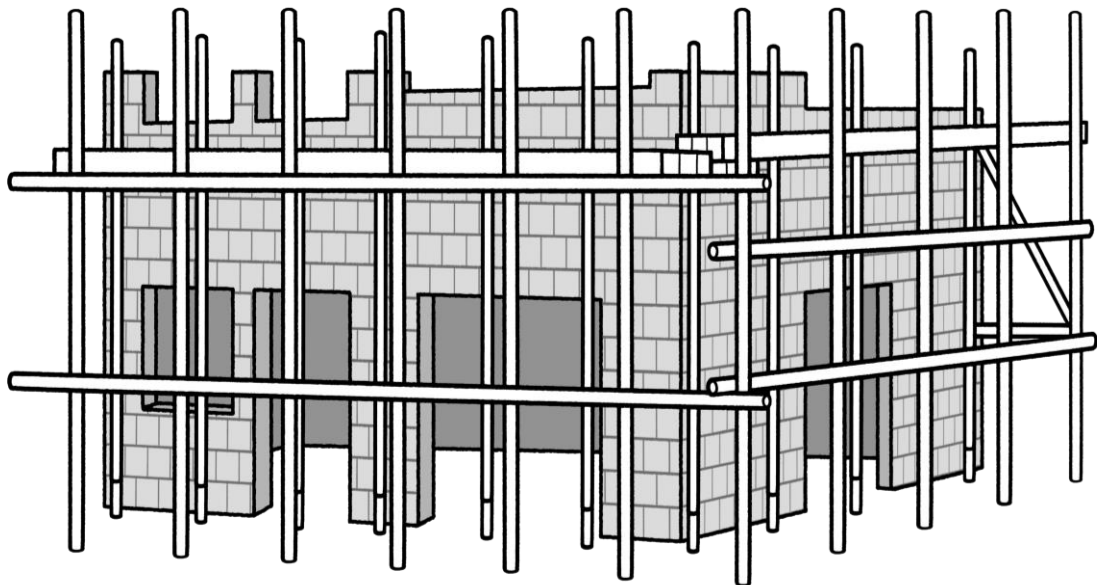
Teaching through play means using playful ways to support children's learning, not only during child-directed activities but also during teacher-directed activities when introducing new concepts and skills. All learning activities in the daily programme should be playful and reflect the characteristics of play:

- ◆ Joyful
- ◆ Meaningful
- ◆ Actively engaging
- ◆ Iterative
- ◆ Socially interactive



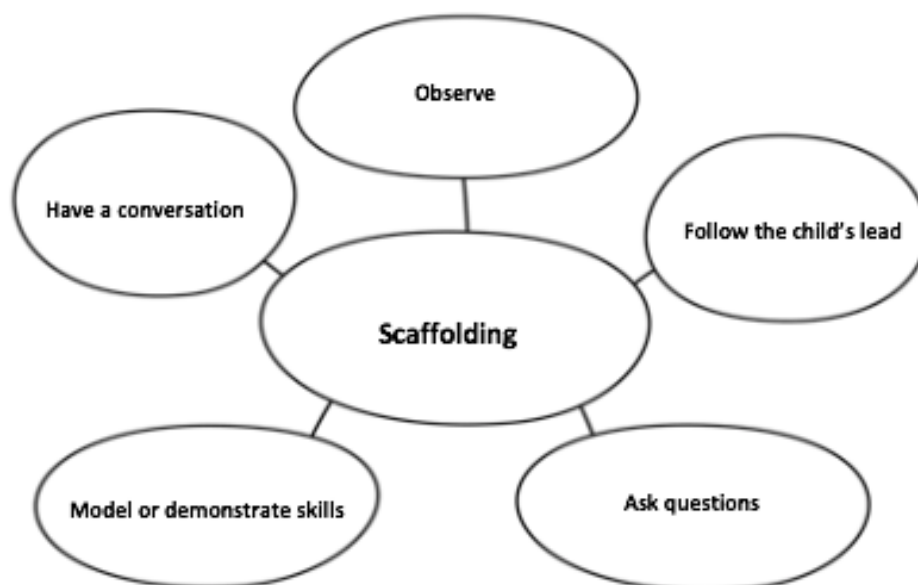
Scaffolding refers to the different ways in which teachers support children during play to help them learn concepts and develop skills

In the same way that the scaffolding that supports workers while they are building or repairing a building is slowly taken away as the building work continues, teachers provide support until the child has mastered the skill or concept and can work on their own. When the concept or skill is new, the teacher provides the most support and, as the child becomes more skilled, the teacher slowly takes the support away, based on how she sees that the child is responding.



**Scaffolding a building**

**Scaffolding children's learning during play**



**Scaffolding children's learning**

Some of the ways that teachers can scaffold children's learning during play are:

## **Observe**

It is important to take some time to first observe children as they play – to learn what they are interested in, how they are using the play materials and what they might be learning. This will help you to decide how best you can support their learning. For example, you can provide additional materials or by join in children's play to help them problem-solve, introduce new vocabulary or extend their learning about a concept.

## **Follow the child's lead**

During child-initiated and child-directed activities teachers do not take the lead in the play activity. When joining in play the teacher:

- ◆ builds on what children are saying and doing
- ◆ encourages children to express their ideas
- ◆ uses children's ideas to extend their thinking and learning
- ◆ offer suggestions that support the child's ideas

*Follow the CAR* is a teaching strategy that is promoted by Head Start and the National Head Start Family Literacy Center.

The acronym CAR is an easy way to remember how to interact with the child:

Follow the child's lead by making sure that you have the child's attention and then:

- C      **Comment** and wait OR
- A      **Ask** a question and wait OR
- R      **Respond** by adding a little more and wait.

It is important to give the child a chance to think about what you have said or the question you have asked.

### **Activity: Follow the CAR**

#### **Scenario**

The teacher is observing four-year-old Ashley playing with blocks. He has made a ramp by placing two blocks under one long block. He is now rolling different objects down his ramp.

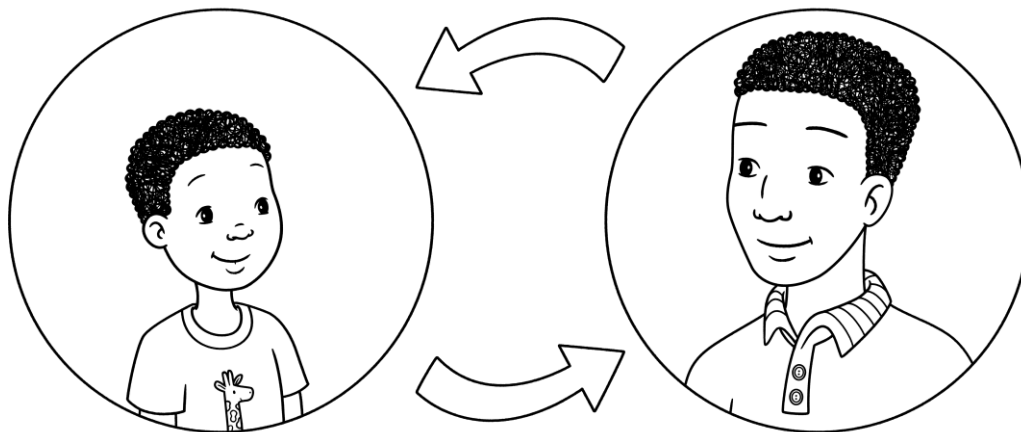
1. With your partner, decide who will play the role the teacher and who will be the child.
2. The teacher interacts with the child using the *Follow the CAR* teaching strategy.
3. Swap roles.

After the activity discuss what happened:

- ◆ How did you get the child's attention?
- ◆ What comments did you make? What did you say or do?
- ◆ How did the child respond?

- ◆ What questions did you ask?
- ◆ How did the child respond?
- ◆ What information did you add?
- ◆ How did the child respond?
- ◆ What do you think the child learned?
- ◆ What part was the most difficult to do?

### **My turn, your turn**



### **Taking turns**

An important way to follow the child's lead is back-and-forth interactions typical of a conversation. This is sometimes called serve and return as in a tennis match. In the same way the baby or child initiates an interaction by reaching out, and the adult responds in a meaningful way by copying the child's sounds and gestures. For example, a baby makes eye contact with the caregiver, babbles and smiles. The adult responds by making eye contact and communicating in the same way with gestures, words and smiles – and then waits to see how the baby responds.

### **Have a conversation**

Having a conversation involves a two-way process of listening and speaking.

A good way to start a conversation is to describe what you see the child doing, or ask the child to describe what they are doing. Wait for the child to respond and give them an opportunity to share their ideas and explain their thinking.

Build on what they say by asking a question that relates to what they are doing, or providing language or information that will help to extend their learning.

### **Ask questions**

Asking good questions is an important part of play-based teaching. There are different kinds of questions.

- ◆ **Closed questions** ask for information and can usually be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', or one or two words. You can use closed questions to find out whether the child knows something or has learned something. For example
  - ◆ What colour are your shoes?
  - ◆ Which is the biggest block?
  - ◆ How many cars do you see?
- ◆ **Open-ended questions** do not have one correct answer and encourage children to think of the many possible answers. As children explain their reasons, they extend their thinking and learn to solve problems.

For example:

- ◆ What do you think will happen?
- ◆ How do you know...?
- ◆ How can you find out?
- ◆ Why do you need...?
- ◆ Can you think of a way to...?
- ◆ What would happen if...?

Make sure that when you ask questions you give children time to think about their answers.

#### **Activity : Open-ended questions**

- ◆ In your group, discuss and write down the kinds of open-ended questions you could ask children to extend their learning as they play with water.
- ◆ Prepare a role play to demonstrate how you would use open-ended questions to extend children's learning during this activity.
- ◆ Tip: Remember to Follow the CAR!
- ◆ Choose someone to play the role of the teacher and the rest of the group will play the roles of the children.

#### **Model or demonstrate skills**

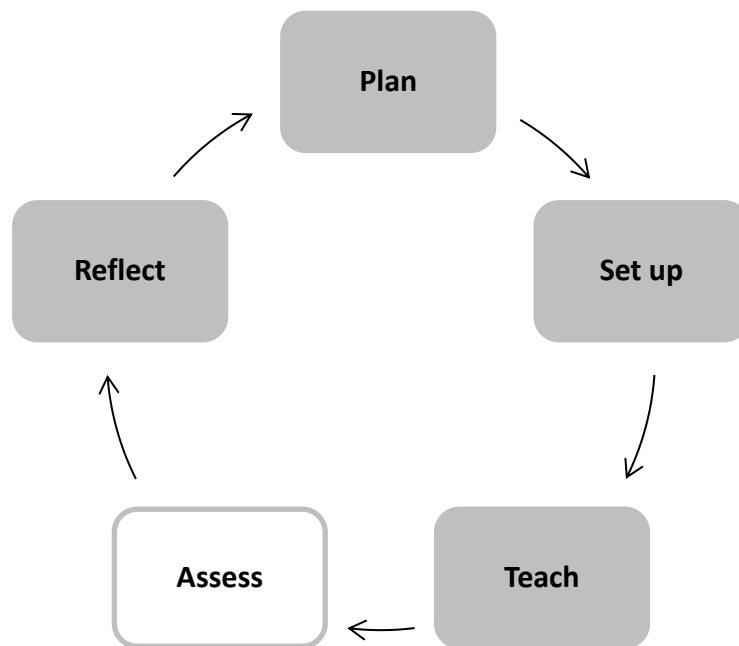
There will be times when a concept or skill needs to be demonstrated by the teacher. What is most important to remember is that babies, toddlers and young children are active learners who learn by doing and that the activities should be playful.

#### **Activity : Modelling and demonstrating**

Plan a small or large group activity in which you demonstrate a concept or skill.

1. Decide on an age group.
2. Select from the play materials provided.
3. Prepare a role play to present to the larger group.

## Assess



### A play-based approach to teaching and learning - Assess

#### Purpose

This session aims to introduce participants to play-based assessment. The session will cover the importance of play-based assessment and look at how teachers plan and prepare for play-based assessment in their everyday activities.

#### Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- ◆ Reflect on their own knowledge and experiences of assessing children's learning and development
- ◆ Understand and explain why play-based assessment is important
- ◆ Participate in play-based assessment activities.
- ◆ Describe how to plan and prepare for play-based assessment

## What is play-based assessment?



### Assessing through observing play

Play-based assessment involves observing and assessing babies, toddlers and children during everyday activities as they play alone and with others.

During play-based assessment

- ◆ Children are relaxed and not under pressure to perform and it is more likely that they will be able to demonstrate their learning.
- ◆ Teachers can learn more about what children know and can do than they would in formal testing procedures.
- ◆ All developmental areas can be assessed (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) as children are observed playing and interacting with other children.

Play- based assessment might involve:

- ◆ Playing games with babies to find out how they move and what they do with toys.
- ◆ Planning play activities for children to demonstrate specific skills, e.g. an obstacle course to observe children demonstrate physical skills.
- ◆ Interacting with children using play materials to find out more about their level of learning or understanding of a concept.

## **Set up the environment for play-based assessment**

An environment where children play, explore and discover things for themselves is ideal for assessment. Make sure the play space is safe and that babies, toddlers and young children can explore freely with play things that

- ◆ are right for their stages of development
- ◆ support holistic development
- ◆ present challenges to children
- ◆ can be used by all children, including children with disabilities and other special learning needs
- ◆ reflect children's family backgrounds and culture.

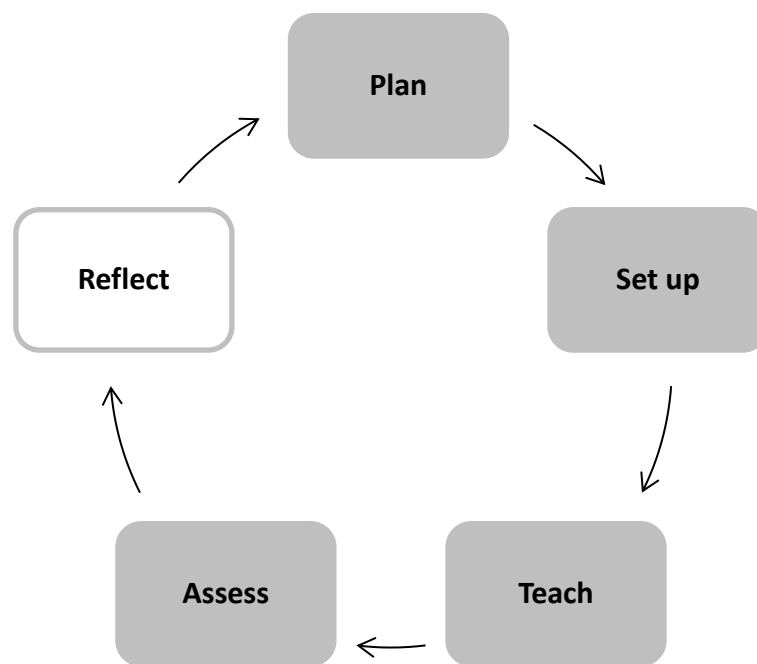
## **Plan for play-based assessment**

Your planned programme needs to provide play activities that cover the goals and indicators set out in the assessment tool.

1. Identify the indicator(s) in the assessment tool that you will be assessing.
2. Think about what skills or behaviours the indicator is asking you to look for and in what play activity children might demonstrate these skills and behaviours.
3. Consider any changes to the play environment and activities that might help the observation and assessment process.

UNICEF and the DBE have developed an assessment tool and guidance on play-based assessment for the South African National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years.

## Reflect



### A play-based approach to teaching and learning – Reflect

#### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to explain to participants what reflective teaching practice is and describe its importance in improving play-based teaching and learning. The session introduces the experiential learning cycle as a tool for reflective practice.

#### Learning outcomes

- ◆ Discuss and understand the importance of reflective teaching
- ◆ Explain how to use the experiential learning cycle as a way of reflecting on play-based teaching and learning.

#### What is a reflective teacher?

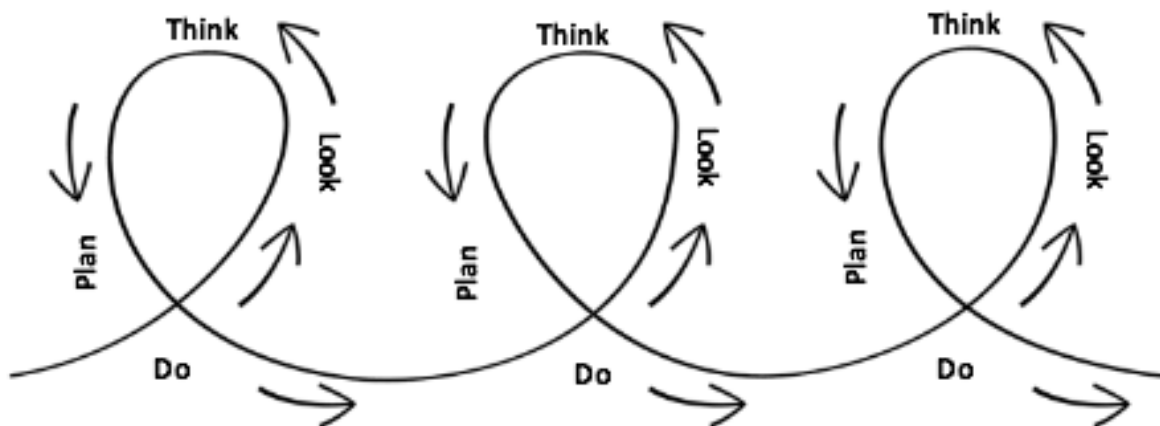
We learn when we take the time to reflect or critically think about our teaching practice and use this information to make changes and improvements.

- ◆ Reflective teaching helps you to learn more about the children in your group and their developmental needs so that you can plan play experiences and interactions that best support their development.
- ◆ Reflective learning helps you to look at how you have been teaching – what worked well and what did not work so well. You use what you have learned to think of ways to do things differently and better, and then try these out to see if they work.



## The experiential learning cycle

The experiential learning cycle is a tool that we can use to reflect on teaching and learning.



Steps of the Experiential Learning Cycle

We <b>plan</b> play-based activities to meet curriculum goals.	The teacher plans a creative art activity for the toddlers in her group.
We <b>do</b> or carry out the planned activities.	The teacher sets out art materials and a few children come to the table. She tells them that she will hand out the crayons and that they are to draw a dog. She gives every child a crayon. Joan does not want a blue crayon, puts it down and walks off. A few children start to make marks and draw lines on their pages with the crayons. The teacher joins Welekazi and draws four legs on her page. Welekazi tears the page and starts to cry.
We <b>look</b> at what happened.	<p>The teacher makes the following observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ The children at the drawing table were each given a crayon and I told them to draw a dog.</li> <li>♦ A few of the children made marks on their pages for a short time and then started to grab crayons from each other.</li> <li>♦ One child did not like the colour of her crayon and walked off.</li> <li>♦ Welekazi did not like the shared activity of drawing the dog with me."</li> </ul>

We <b>think</b> about why things happened the way they did.	<p>The teacher thinks that the activity was not a success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Some of the children misbehaved and on the whole the children were not very interested in drawing a dog.</li> <li>◆ Most children did not stay long at the drawing table.</li> <li>◆ This activity was not appropriate for the children's ages. They did not have a choice of crayons and were not free to explore the materials in their own way. Welekazi was proud of what she had drawn and I think this is why she got upset when I drew on her page.</li> </ul>
We <b>plan</b> , using what we have learned to improve the activity.	<p>The teacher plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ I will set out a variety of crayons and paper and let the children choose their materials, so that they can create their own pictures.</li> </ul>

### Activity: Reflective teaching / the experiential learning cycle

Read the scenario and then discuss the questions that follow

The teacher plans a creative art activity for the toddlers in her group. S/he sets out art materials and a few children come to the table. S/he tells them that she will hand out the crayons and that they are to draw a dog. S/he gives every child a crayon. Joan does not want a blue crayon, puts it down and walks off. A few children start to make marks and draw lines on their pages with the crayons. The teacher joins Welekazi and draws four legs on her page. Welekazi tears the page and starts to cry.

In your group, discuss:

- ◆ What happened?
- ◆ Why do you think this happened?
- ◆ What could the teacher do differently next time?

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